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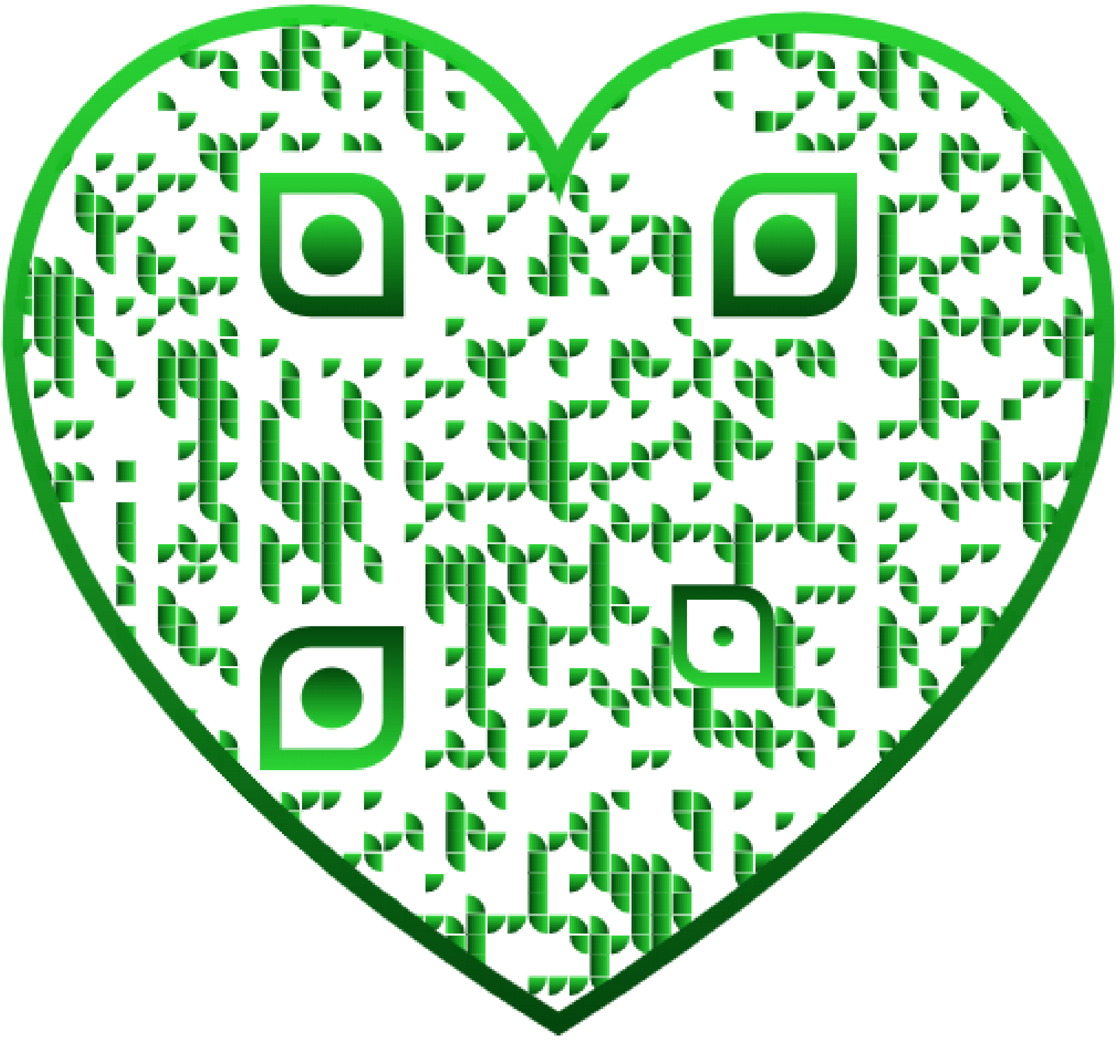

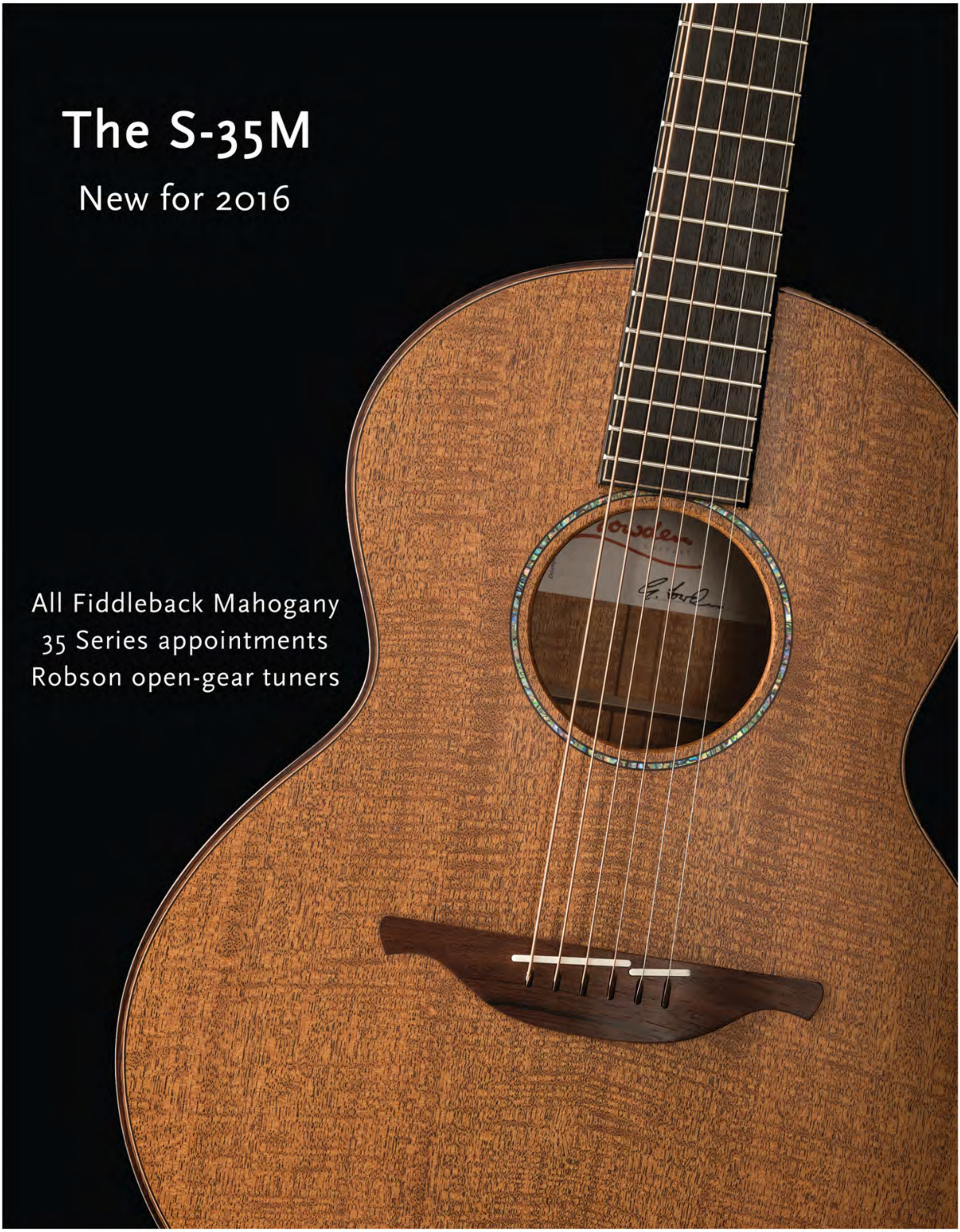

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THE ROOT NOTE

Summer is long gone, winter isn't just coming it's basically already here and the London Acoustic Show 2016 is behind us. You'd expect things to be a bit glum at *Acoustic* HQ, but thankfully you'd be wrong. Admittedly, there isn't much we can do about the weather other than turn up the storage heaters and make sure our guitars are kept well away from them, but we've had a great time reminiscing about the London Acoustic Show while putting together the feature that you can find on page 50.

First of all, I'd like to say a huge thanks to all those who attended: visitors, artists, exhibitors and the staff behind the show who do such a great job making sure everything runs smoothly. I was fortunate to speak to a number of great people at the show who took the time to chat to me about the magazine and their thoughts on it. Walking round the exhibitor hall afforded me the opportunity to chat to manufacturers, luthiers and retailers, and I came away with a ton of information regarding new products that I was sworn to secrecy about… but I'm sure if you keep your eyes on the reviews section you may see some exciting gear in the coming months.

As I'm sure many of you were aware, this was the first London Acoustic Show that had been organised by Future Publishing, and plans are already afoot to make next year's show an even stronger offering for lovers of acoustic guitars and acoustic music. As always, I'd like to hear your thoughts on what you'd like to see at 2017's event – from recommending an artist to perform on the main stage to letting me know if you found it easy to get the venue, drop me an email at the address in the side-bar on this page.

My favourite thing about the show is the chance to watch some incredible guitarists up close. I came away inspired to pick up my guitar and practise with renewed focus and enthusiasm. I'd like to pick out Blair Dunlop's masterclass on Sunday as a particular highlight. Considering it was his first ever time on stage talking about his craft rather than just playing his many hits, it was a rousing and informative session.

There's a bit of a show theme running through the mag this month. We've got an interview with Steve 'N' Seagulls, who I first saw perform at the show in 2015. They blew me away with their immense skill, but also the sheer sense of fun of their set. They may play bluegrass covers of heavy metal songs, but don't call them a novelty band – they're far too skilled as arrangers and musicians for that. But, during the interview, they also raise an interesting point about success. They made their name initially by producing slick videos on YouTube that soon went viral. They toured the world off the back of these videos, but still consider the act of recording an album – and *Brothers In Farms*, which has just been released, is their second – the ultimate aim. This, despite the fact that they could have existed as a band comfortably just creating more videos on YouTube.

So what is success nowadays as a musician? Well, I'd consider doing something that has never been done before a pretty good barometer. So step forward the Shires, who grace our cover this month. The Shires were the first UK country act to break into the top ten of the album chart, and their second album looks like a contender for the top spot as we send this magazine to press (though early reports suggest that 'comeback kid' Craig David might pip them).

Also, congratulations must go to Passenger, last month's cover star, whose new album recently took pole position in the UK chart, and rising country duo Ward Thomas (who we've interviewed for the next issue), who managed the same feat the week before. If recent evidence is anything to go by, chart success, at least, can be made easier with the addition of an acoustic guitar.

Enjoy the issue.
Nick Robbins

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DAVID GRAY ON TOUR TO SUPPORT GREATEST HITS ALBUM

Acclaimed UK singer-songwriter David Gray will play his first UK tour dates for two years with a series of acoustic solo shows in support of his new *Greatest Hits* album.

Gray's *Greatest Hits* will be released on 28 October on CD, deluxe CD and double gatefold vinyl, and take in hits from his 25-year career, including those of commercial smash *White Ladder*, and two brand new songs. He has also teamed up with Spotify to create a constantly updating playlist that changes weekly to reflect the most streamed tracks in Gray's catalogue.

He has also selected tracks that will feature on the deluxe CD and vinyl version that have, in his words, "have been selected by me for no other reason than that they occupy a special place in my heart and have meant a lot to me down the years."

'An Evening with David Gray' dates:
11 December – Albert Hall, **Manchester**
13 December – Cadogan Hall, **London**
14 December – Cadogan Hall, **London**
17 December – Sage, **Gateshead**
18 December – Colston Hall, **Bristol**

JIM CORR GRABS CUSTOM AVALON

Irish luthiers Avalon have produced a special guitar for Jim Corr. Steve McIlwrath at Avalon told us: "This is a one-off build, not a signature model, based on our standard Americana D300A model. The chief differences in Jim's guitar are upgrades to the top, back and sides, rosette and the addition of a custom fretboard inlay."

Those tonewood upgrades include a bearclaw sitka spruce top and Tibetan tiger maple back and sides, while the rosette stands out with a custom mother-of-pearl and ebony design.

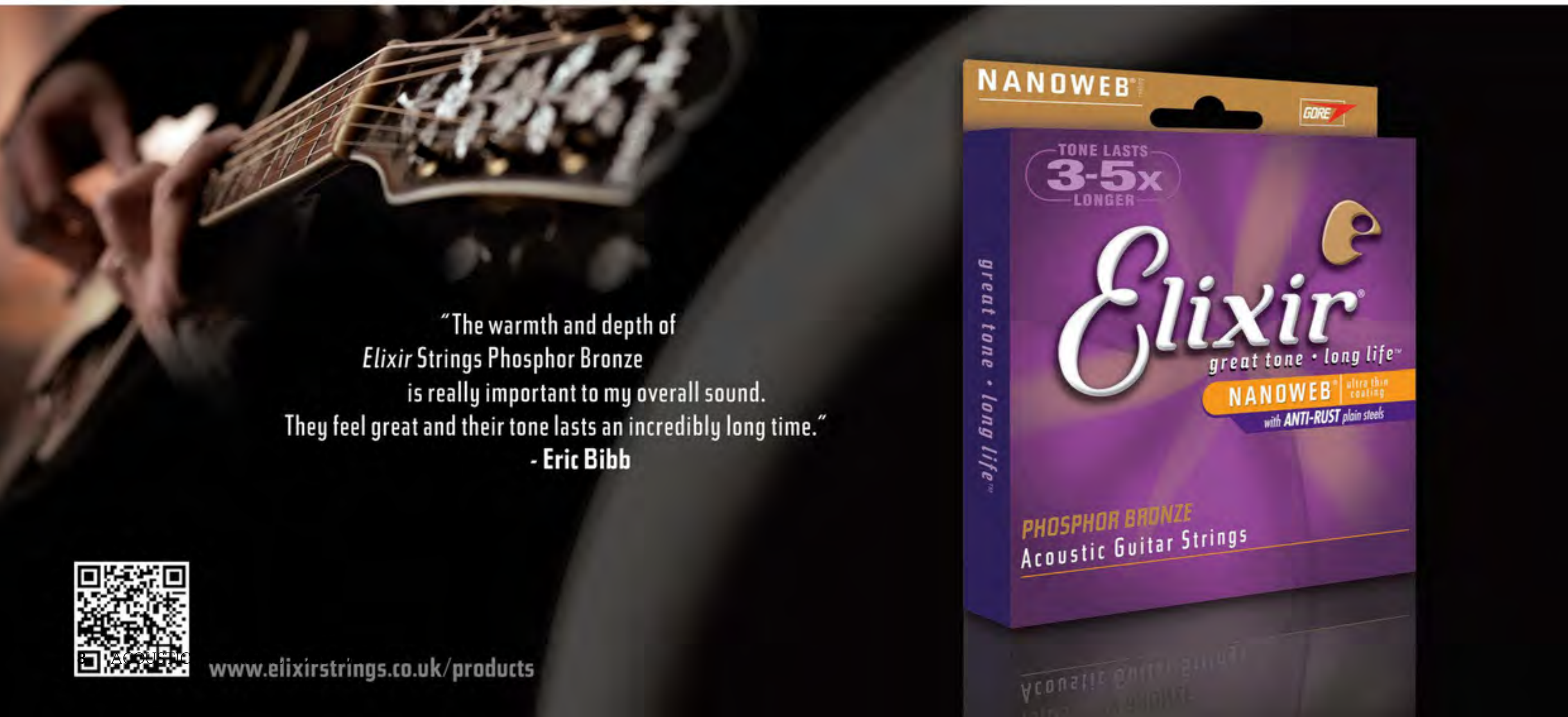
You can find out more on Avalon's website, **www.avalonguitars.com**, and look out in a future issue for an interview with Jim.

IRIG HD 2 GETS AN UPGRADE

IK Multimedia has revealed the iRig HD 2, the newest version of its iRig interface, which offers mobile playability. New features include high quality 24-bit/96kHz audio, an integrated headphone out with level control, a new amp-out jack with switchable output, full versions of AmpliTube for Mac, PC and iOS, plus total mobility and connectivity. That new integrated headphone-out will be of particular interest to Apple iPhone 7 users struggling to come to terms with the loss of the 1/8" headphone jack from their phone.

One new feature is the FX setting, which, according to IK, "sends your processed signal, or the sound coming out of your software/app to the external device. This is perfect when you want to use your iPad or Laptop as your effects pedalboard, your amp's front end or complete tone rig in a live setting."

This all-in-one mobile rig, suitable for use with any Mac/PC or iOS device, will retail at €121.99 and more info can be found at **www.ikmultimedia.com**



CORT BOOSTS ACOUSTIC BASS OFFERING

Cort has bolstered its acoustic bass roster with the addition of the AB850F.

The bass's full-sized jumbo body offers a spruce top and mahogany back and sides, and comes in natural or black finishes. Attention to detail comes courtesy of a dovetail neck joint and Venetian cutaway for upper-fret access, while a 22-fret rosewood fingerboard on 34" scale length neck is complemented by a rosewood bridge.

This electro-acoustic also includes Fishman's Isys + EQ preamp, which features a two-band EQ, LED tuner and phase control, as well as a Fishman Sonicore pickup.
More details at **www.cortguitars.net**

LAKA ADDS BASS UKES

The ukulele brand Laka has made the move into the bass ukulele market with two new models. The first, a mahogany build (RRP £219), sports a combination of mahogany and sapele with a mahogany neck and fretless rosewood fingerboard, and is fitted with an onboard **Fishman Clásica II** preamp system. Meanwhile the koa model, coming in at £269, has an acacia koa body, set off by the black binding and abalone rosette.

You can find out more about the Laka range by visiting the website of UK distributor JHS & Co – **www.jhs.co.uk**

THE SHIRES HIT THE ROAD

Rising country acts and this month's cover stars, the Shires are off on tour to launch new album *My Universe*. The duo will travel around the UK in November and December for 14 shows, with more sets to be announced.

WINTER 2016 TOUR DATES

November
23 – Royal and Derngate, **Northampton**
24 – St David's Hall, **Cardiff**
25 – Corn Exchange, **Bedford**
27 – Cambridge Corn Exchange, **Bedford**
28 – Colston Hall, **Bristol**
29 – Brighton Dome, **Brighton**

December
02 – Venue Cymru, **Llandudno**
03 – Institute, **Birmingham**
04 – Bridgewater Hall, **Manchester**
05 – Sage, **Gateshead**
07 – O2 ABC Glasgow, **Glasgow**
08 – York Barbican, **York**
09 –O2 Academy, **Liverpool**
11 – O2 Shepherd's Bush Empire, **London**

LONDON FOLK & ROOTS FESTIVAL

The third London Folk & Roots Festival will run from 27 October to 26 November across various London venues, including the Union Chapel, Bush Hall and the Shepherd's Bush Empire. Confirmed acts include Newton Faulkner (pictured), Sarah Jarosz, Eliza Carthy, Jon Boden and Maz O'Connor.

David Messer, from organisers DMP, said: "Now in its third year, the London Folk & Roots Festival is fast becoming an established part of London's music calendar. It continues to grow in size, with an eclectic mix of UK and international artists.

"In addition to the bigger names on the bill, our new partners EFDSS (English Folk Dance and Song Society) have helped bring in many new artists, providing them with the platform to play in front of larger audiences."
For a full list of dates and performers, visit **www.londonfolkandroots.com**

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ASK THE EXPERTS

SELLING YOUR SESSION SERVICES ONLINE IS A GROWING BUSINESS, BUT THERE'S A LOT TO KNOW BEFORE YOU SET UP. THE MU GETS US DIALLED UP…

Online session work is a fast-growing income stream for professional players, allowing them to cut out the middle men and get directly to the customer. "Even if you are an ambitious and talented young player, it is still hard to break into the established fixer or contractors' books," says MU sessions official Pete Thoms. "This way, you can market yourself directly to the clients without waiting for a fixer to recognise your ability." You can work from home, which cuts out travel and other expenses, and record until you are happy with the job done.

But it's not just emerging musicians who are getting into the online fray. Many more established players are getting into it too, able to complete more than one commission a day, arrange sessions at their own convenience and send completed audio files in seconds.

There is no single definitive route into online session work, but just as with face-to-face studio recording, there's a lot that you can do to make yourself more employable.

First of all, decide on exactly what it is you can offer. Do you have a specific style or range of instruments? Or are you quick at turning around short, high quality jobs? When you've established your unique selling point, invest a little in your studio set-up. A decent DAW (digital audio workstation) is a must, as are the best microphones that you can afford – it will be worth it in the long run.

Ensure your website is clear about what you offer, how much you charge and the process for a customer to access your services. Credits detailing your past session work are always helpful. Include a comprehensive list of terms and conditions.

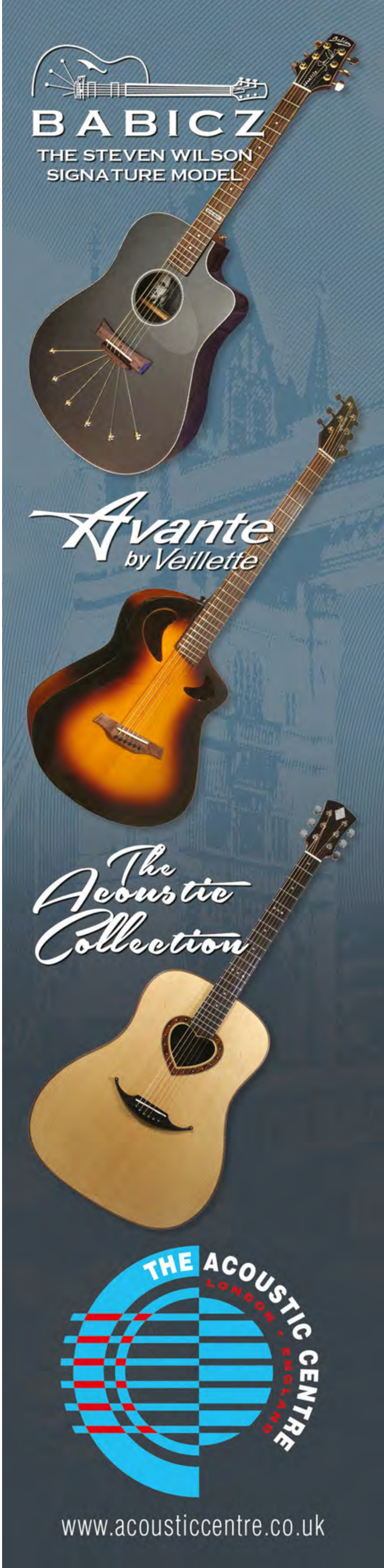
Know and understand your brief, and set realistic fees that take into account your time, your experience and how long it takes to engineer and prepare files for transmission. Where possible, request payment in advance. The MU's recommended minimum rates are a good starting point if you're new to session playing and don't know what kind of fee you should ask for.

It's important to set fair terms and expectations from the outset. Get an agreement in writing that details what you and the client have agreed to. It is likely you will be working for people who you don't know and will never meet, so establishing a clear framework can help avoid any misunderstandings and encourage them to recommend you to other potential clients.

Often the future use of the recording may not be known, so effectively you may be granting all rights in all media unless you specify some limitation in your agreement with the client. If you play on what you were initially informed was only a record session and the music ends up in a film or advert, you need to be clear that further use of this type is not covered by your agreement.

If you're an MU member, the easiest way to protect yourself is to get in touch and talk to one of our experts. MU members can use one of our consent forms to show they give consent to a producer or record label for their music to be used. You can also get contracts you are given checked over by our Contract Advisory Service – specialist solicitors with plenty of experience in the music industry – for no extra fee. ■

For specialist advice, including our contract advisory service and more on any aspect of being a musician, get in touch via theMU.org, tweet us @WeAreTheMU or follow us on Facebook at facebook.com/Musicians.Union.



KELVIN JONES

WORDS: TOM VOCE **IMAGES:** GEORGE FAIRBAIRN

Stevenage's new pop prince talks to Acoustic about stratospheric videos, sleeping with his guitar and the new chorus/chorus/chorus pop formula

There are many different ways that an artist can find their big break and secure the backing of powerful opinion shapers. One way is to write a killer tune, get the video on *Good Morning America* and convince your mum to let you quit your civil engineering degree. It's a stretch to say this route is standard, but it's worked well so far for rising star Kelvin Jones.

"I'd done two or three songs before that, but I thought this one might be special," says Kelvin of his breakthrough hit 'Call You Home'. "It got maybe a thousand views after a month. The rest of my videos had a few hundred, so I was really quite happy."

The rest is history: the subsequent Twitter explosion, the front page of Reddit, the segment on *Good Morning America*.

"I got a tweet from a lady saying 'Hey, can we use your song on *Good Morning America*?' and because of how crazy everything else had been, I was like 'This isn't for real; this is bullshit.' I didn't believe it at all. So I just said 'Cool, thanks. Go for it.' Sure enough, next morning she sends me a message with a link: 'Here's the segment. We used it on *Good Morning America*. Have a nice day.'

"Even after *Good Morning* it still took some arguing, but that was the moment where I saw the look in my mum's eyes change. TV was a media form she understood."

Free to pursue pop, Kelvin recorded the upbeat and soulful *Stop The Moment* last year after signing with Sony. "I remember when we went to meet labels, and management were marketing me as a male Tracy Chapman." While acknowledging a similarity in vocal style, Jones wears his true influences on his sleeve. At least, he wears one on his forearm in the shape of a 'BB' inscribed in a circle (cleverly reminiscent of the way Egyptian kings' names were always written within rounded cartouches). This pop man is a blues boy.

"The way I discovered blues was through John Mayer. I thought 'I like this guy – kind of pop' and then I saw *Where The Light Is* which is my favourite album. I traced that back to his heroes: who did he listen to? That was Stevie Ray Vaughn, BB King, Albert King… It goes on and on and all the way back to Robert Johnson."

Sure enough, the shuffly, dusty feel of 'Call You Home' is reminiscent of some of the old delta tunes. However, Kelvin's music, by his own admission, is pop through and through. Since everybody knows what the blues formula is, I ask him about 'the pop formula'.

"I've been doing a lot of writing in the last two months ,which has made me sick of pop," Jones says. "I love pop. I can be sick of pop and love

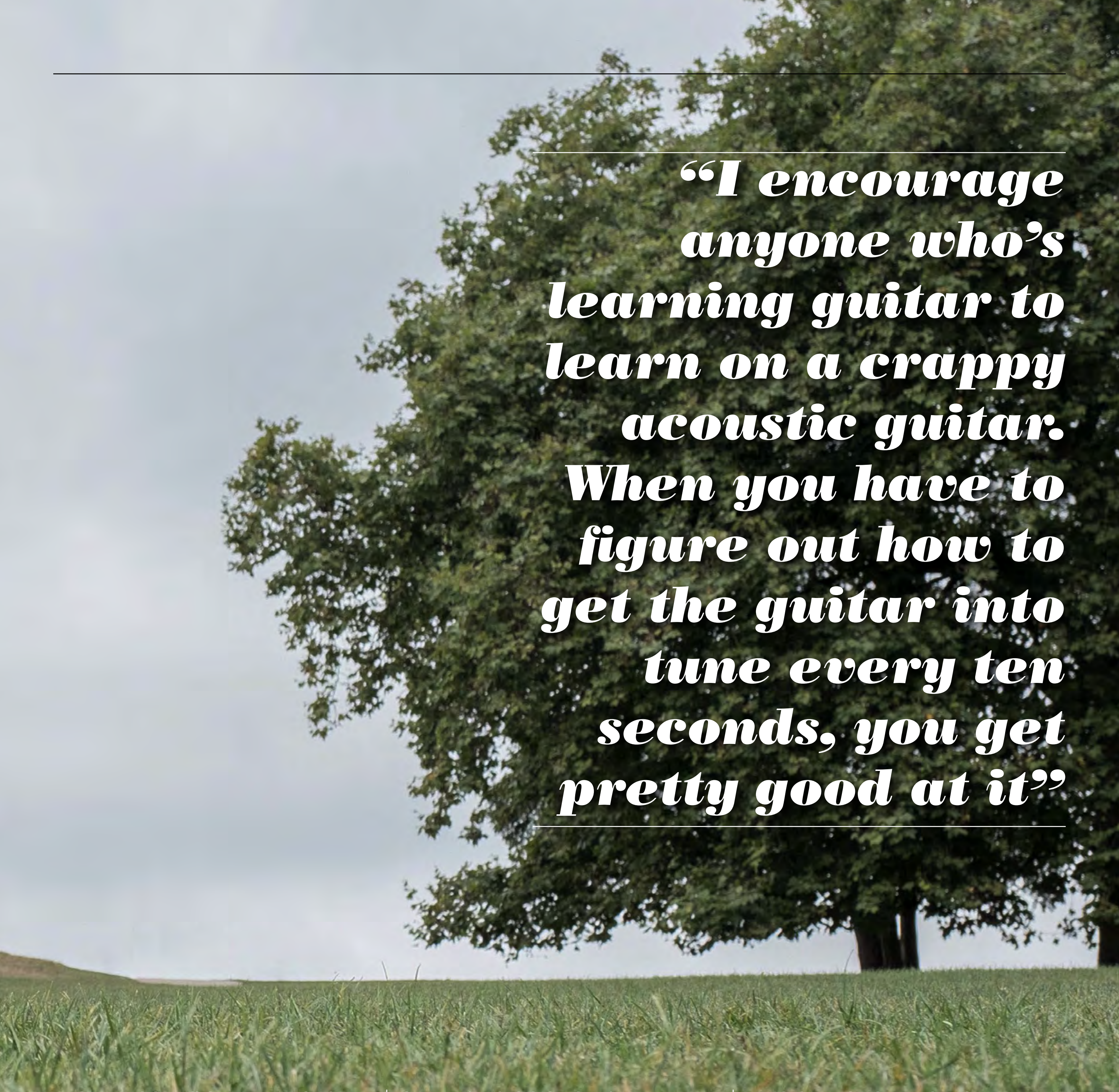
pop. I can't do anything else. That's all I write. It's the same with blues. For a while I was sick because I couldn't listen to I-IV-V again. There is something about the blues formula. The idea is 'what else can you do that's new over this?' These are the chords, what can you do over this that's gonna make me think of something else?

"Interestingly enough, pop is exactly the same," he adds. "Pop gives us a big chorus that's going to catch my heart before I even realise it. It's very simple, but it's about what else you can do over the same old formula. Typically in pop you go verse, chorus, verse, chorus, middle eight, quiet chorus, big chorus. But it's playing around with that that excites me. Dylan would do just verses – all verse and no chorus – and it's still pop."

Satisfied with this answer, I listen to Jones go on to capture the essence of what seems like an arms race in pop at the moment while musing over the audacious two chorus structure of Zara Larsson's 'Lush Life': "When amazing writers come together, they go 'Instead of giving me a verse section, pre chorus and a chorus, just give me a chorus, a chorus and a chorus and let's make that work.' It's so catchy, you're already there. You hear it and you think 'That's such a catchy start to a song'. It's because it's a chorus. Then the pre-chorus: that's a chorus as well. The middle eight? That's a chorus too. That's what pop music has become now. Every section has to be some kind of a chorus. It's insane!"

Creating catchy tunes is only part of Jones' idiom; his other main interest is videography. His accompanying videos are of the catchy, high-concept variety: the first for 'Call You Home' and the newest for the single 'Closer' both illustrate brilliant concepts that everyone else wishes they'd thought of – the latter video being Kelvin's own idea. For 'Call You Home', Kelvin worked with director Joe Connor. "He said 'I want to put a box in space.' He wanted six iPads as a box to send into space and I was like 'He's insane. Let's do that!' Then we worked with the idea and thought a TV would be more relatable, because people know what that is. Then we actually sent it into space, which is the most ridiculous thing. We talked to some very smart people who figured out the exact physics behind it. Sure enough, we shot it into space."

For the current single 'Closer', Connor directs Kelvin's idea of a date spanning the ages, from hipster Edwardian times through Hitchcock film noir, swinging 60s, kaleidoscopic 70s to the MTV years, taking in the Calvin Klein



> **“I encourage anyone who’s learning guitar to learn on a crappy acoustic guitar. When you have to figure out how to get the guitar into tune every ten seconds, you get pretty good at it”**

aesthetic, and then all the way up to the Ikea age of today.

In the age of quantum computers, squelchy bass synths and TVs in space, what is the appeal of the acoustic guitar? “It’s so strange. It should be dead by now. It so should be dead by now. I’ve tried to understand it. In a mix you can’t really hear it but you can feel it. I think it’s the simplicity. You know exactly what it is and it’s not challenging. You listen to it and you just feel at home.”

Jones has only been playing guitar for five years, but clearly his obsession with making music started at an early age. “I knew I was a guitarist before I learned one plus one. I remember being in Zimbabwe and making a guitar out of some rubber bands and stuff. You’ve got your bands, you’ve got your bottle thing. You’re a little kid and you’re messing around, you can whack it and make a sound. It’s so primitive!”

He would later play his first ‘proper’ guitar, albeit a “really crappy old Hudson” that his brother bought then gave up on. “I encourage anyone who’s learning guitar to learn on a crappy acoustic guitar. When you have to figure out how to get the guitar into tune every ten seconds, you get pretty good at it. When you’re trying to play on a guitar that’s way too big and you’re trying to play an F chord that doesn’t want to be an F chord, your fingers get pretty strong pretty quickly.

“Every time I got home I was straight on to the guitar until I was falling asleep while playing, sometimes sleeping with it.” Two upgrades followed: first, a Martin 000X1AE allowing him to make his mark in his popular solo performance videos, and then the other once he was signed, a Martin OM28: “A beautiful sounding guitar. Beautiful guitar. That’s what I’m currently on.”

Kelvin will be touring his first string of headline shows in October, featuring songs from his album *Stop The Moment*. What kind of moments would he pause if he had a button? “I look back and really wish I’d just appreciated just sitting and talking to my buddies about nothing – not just the ‘I’m in front of 25,000 people’ moments. Playing Xbox for hours and just losing yourself in nothingness. When you look back, everyone’s got the collage of ‘my greatest hits’, but what life is made up of is the other 90 per cent. That’s the stuff that I really want to just learn to appreciate more, because then you don’t let life pass you by.” ■

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14689 - Breedlove Revival DR Deluxe
14688 - Breedlove Voice Auditorium Small Jumbo
14686 - Breedlove Voice Concert Myrtle
14630 - Breedlove Voice Revival 000/SMe
10068 - Brian May Rhapsody Electro, Cherry
4769 - EKO Ranger EQ Vintage Series, Black
12358 - Faith FKV Venus Concert Cutaway/Electro
15344 - Faith Nomad Mini Neptune
15345 - Faith Nomad Mini Saturn
14730 - Fender CD100CE Left-Handed Cutaway
6943 - Fender CD60CE, Electro, Black
7024 - Fender CD60CE, Dreadnought, Electro, Nat
4335 - Fender CD60CE Dreadnought Elec, Sunburst
10320 - Fender CD60CE Mahogany Electro Acoustic
15523 - Fender CF60CE Folk-Size Cutaway Electro
14732 - Fender CJ290SCE Jumbo Maple With Case
15280 - Fender PM1 Deluxe, Vintage Sunburst
15355 - Fender PM3 Dlx Triple-0 Vintage Sunburst
15573 - Fender San Miguel Acoustic, Secondhand
14744 - Fender Sonoran SCE Left-hand Dreadnought
15525 - Fender Sonoran SCE, Candy Apple Red
9700 - Gibson J45 Custom Electro Acoustic
15380 - Gibson Songwriter Deluxe, Secondhand
15600 - Jimmy Moon 0003 Acoustic, Secondhand
8091 - Jimmy Moon 0003CE Electro Acoustic
4555 - Jimmy Moon Bryan Adams Signature

6 String Electro Acoustics

9552 - LAG T300AE Electro Acoustic Guitar
12672 - Lakewood J14CP Jumbo Electro
12658 - Lakewood M14 CP
14129 - Luna Heartsong Series Parlor Electro
14130 - Luna Henna Oasis Steel String Electro
13717 - Maestro Raffles AB-CSB A Guitar
13714 - Maestro Raffles FM-CSB A Custom Jumbo
12696 - Maestro Raffles Flame Maple Cust Electro
12702 - Maestro Raffles IR-CSB R Small Jumbo Electro
12790 - Maestro Raffles MDT Small Jumbo Electro
12789 - Maestro Raffles Monkey Pod Electro
13713 - Maestro Raffles MR-CSB A Custom Jumbo
14817 - Maestro Raffles MR-CSB-A Fanned Frets
12792 - Maestro Rosetta MDT Dreadnought Electro
12793 - Maestro Rosetta MRDT Dreadnought Electro
13212 - Maestro Singa Flame Maple Custom Electro
14814 - Maestro Singa M-CSB-C All Solid MedJumbo
13712 - Maestro Singa MR-CSB A Custom Jumbo
13209 - Maestro Singa MRDT Medium Jumbo Electro
13711 - Maestro Singa O-CSB Custom Medium Jumbo
14815 - Maestro Singa WE-CSB-A Medium Jumbo
13718 - Maestro Victoria with fitted LR Baggs
13207 - Maestro Victoria with fitted LR Baggs
12225 - Martin & Co 000X1AE Electro Acoustic
15474 - Martin & Co DXAE Electro Acoustic
15164 - Martin 000RS1, Secondhand
14479 - Martin 000RSGT Electro Acoustic Guitar
15592 - Martin 0015E Retro Non-Cutaway Electro
8277 - Martin DC15ME Dreadnought Cutaway
15487 - Martin DCPA4 Electro Acoustic, Shaded
14780 - Martin DJR Dreadnought Junior
14477 - Martin DRS2 Electro Acoustic Guitar
14478 - Martin DRSGT Electro Acoustic Guitar
15591 - Martin GPC18E Electro Acoustic Guitar
15486 - Martin GPCPA4 Electro Acoustic Shaded
14528 - Martin HD28 with Fishman, Secondhand,
13674 - Martin OMXAE Electro Acoustic, Black
12439 - Northwood Custom Koa 80D Electro
12438 - Northwood Custom Myrtle 80 Series D/hought
15548 - Ovation 1771 AX Standard Balladeer, CBB
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10094 - RainSong BI-OM1000N2 Black Ice Graphite
10038 - RainSong BI-WS1000N2 Black Ice Graphite
9821 - Rainsong CO-JM1000N2
9819 - Rainsong CO-OM1000N2
9818 - Rainsong CO-WS1000N2
9815 - Rainsong JM1000 Graphite Guitar
4812 - RainSong OM1000N2 Electro Acousti
10082 - RainSong P12 Parlor
10088 - RainSong P14 Parlor
9824 - Rainsong S-DR1000N2 Dreadnought Studio
9827 - RainSong SG Shorty Gloss Shorty Series
7974 - Rainsong WS1000N2 Graphite Guitar
15259 - Rainsong SMCX Smokey Series
15257 - Rainsong SMH Smokey Hybrid
5257 - Satori YD18EQ, Dreadnought Electro, Nat
8234 - Satori YD42EQ Electro Acoustic, Vint Nat
5255 - Satori YO28HEQ, OM Electro, Natural
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15481 - Tanglewood Crossroads TWCR D E
15494 - Tanglewood DBT SFCE PW
15492 - Tanglewood Discovery DBT SFCE BW
13295 - Tanglewood TPESFCEZS Electro Acoustic
14952 - Tanglewood TSF CE Black
14950 - Tanglewood Evolution IV TSF CE Red
14954 - Tanglewood EvolutionTSFCE Sunburst Gloss
14951 - Tanglewood TSF CE White
15583 - Tanglewood TW4 Winterleaf Super Folk BK
15584 - Tanglewood TW4 Winterleaf Super Folk BR
15581 - Tanglewood TW4 Winterleaf Super Folk WH
15582 - Tanglewood TW4 Winterleaf Super Folk CE
4187 - Tanglewood TW40 OANE Orchestra
12669 - Tanglewood TW45 EG E Super Folk Cutaway
15498 - Tanglewood TW5 Winterleaf, Black
15497 - Tanglewood TW5 Winterleaf, Burgandy
15495 - Tanglewood TW5 Winterleaf, Whiskey Gloss
15496 - Tanglewood TW5 Winterleaf, White
14947 - Tanglewood TWCR O Crossroads
15544 - Taylor 214CE Electro Acoustic, Used
13485 - Taylor 515CE Electro Acoustic, Used
14419 - Vintage Pilgrim VPG900 Mayflower Deluxe
8007 - Vintage Gordon Giltrap Signature
13399 - Vintage VECJ100 Jumbo Acoustic Black
13233 - Yamaha AC3M Electro Acoustic, Secondhand
14427 - Yamaha APX1000 Slimline Guitar, Natural
8263 - Yamaha APX500 III Electro Acoustic, Nat
13671 - Yamaha APX500 III Electro, Black
9189 - Yamaha APX500 III Electro, Sunburst
14492 - Yamaha CPX1000 Electro Acoustic, Natural
6961 - Yamaha CPX700 Electro Acoustic Sandburst
14422 - Yamaha FGX720SC, Natural
14421 - Yamaha FJX720SC Electro, Sunburst
15574 - Yamaha FJX730SC, Brown Sunburst
15568 - Yamaha FSX720SC II Brown Sunburst
8142 - Yamaha FSX730SC, Brown Sunburst
14420 - Yamaha FX310A Guitar, Natural
6966 - Yamaha FX370C Dreadnought Electro, Black
6965 - Yamaha FX370C Electro Acoustic, Natural
14522 - Yamaha SLG200S Silent Guitar, Steel
15619 - Yamaha SLG200S Steel Silent Guitar Nat
15617 - Yamaha SLG200S Steel String Silent Guitar In

Classical Guitars

15240 - Admira A20 Classical Handcrafted Guitar
14922 - Admira Alba 4/4 Full Size Classical
15587 - Admira Malaga Classical Guitar
13025 - Admira Malaga Classical Guitar, USED
8590 - Azahar Model 31A Classical Guitar
15546 - David Pelter Handmade Classical Guitar
15547 - David Pelter Handmade Classical Guitar
15585 - Manuel Rodriguez C3 Classical Guitar, S/h
8507 - Mendieta Conservatoire C
5360 - Ramirez 130 Year Aniversary Classical
6029 - Ramirez 1NE Classical Guitar
15239 - Ramirez 2NCWE Classical Guitar
15236 - Ramirez 4NE Classical Guitar
5644 - Ramirez George Harrison Model
6336 - Ramirez R2 Classical Guitar
15237 - Ramirez RA Classical Guitar
15238 - Ramirez RB Classical Guitar
6027 - Ramirez S1 Classical Guitar
12761 - Ramirez SP Classical Guitar
6441 - Roberto C2 Classical Guitar
10999 - Westcoast Student 4/4 Classical, Red
14720 - Yamaha C40II Full Size Classical Guitar
14721 - Yamaha CX40 Mark II Electro-Classical

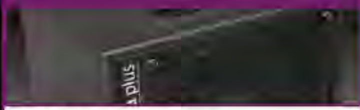
12 Strings

13865 - Breedlove Pursuit 12 String Acoustic
13553 - Eko Vintage Ranger 12 in Black
14525 - Guild JF230-AB USA-Made, c1997
10991 - Tanglewood TRD12 Lefty 12 , Nat
15479 - Tanglewood TW145 12 SS CE
14398 - Vintage VE2000GG12 Giltrap 12-String
14349 - Vintage VE8000PB-12 Paul Brett

Mandolin Family

8826 - Ashbury AM-325 Octave Mandola
15437 - Ashbury Celtic Octave Mandola
15442 - Ashbury Rathlin Irish Bouzouki
13527 - Blue Moon BB15 Bouzouki GR33001
15435 - Blue Moon Irish Bouzouki, Pear Shape
14028 - Breedlove Crossover OO O Hole Mandolin,
14500 - Breedlove Crossover Mandolin, VV
12540 - Fender FM63SE Electro Acoustic Mandolin
12568 - Fender Concert Tone "F" 63S Mandolin
14741 - Fender Concert Tone Mandolin "A" 53S
15532 - Fender Concert Tone Mandolin Pack
9240 - Jimmy Moon A2 Acoustic Mandolin, Natural
15598 - Jimmy Moon A2 Acoustic Mandolin, Natural
4553 - Jimmy Moon Standard Mandolin
15599 - Jimmy Moon Standard Mandolin, K&K Pickup
9430 - Ozark Flat Back Bouzouki
8315 - Westcoast M20 Mandolin Sunburst
12347 - Westcoast M20S Mandolin Sunburst

Acoustic Amplification



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13905 - Blackstar ID Core BEAM Bluetooth Amp
10496 - Fender Acoustasonic 15 Acoustic Amp
8166 - Fender Acoustasonic 150 Acoustic Combo
9166 - Loudbox Artist
4548 - Fishman Loudbox Mini - 60W, 1x6.5"
5286 - Fishman SA220 - 220w, 6x4"
13282 - Markbass AC101 Acoustic Combo
6770 - Marshall AS100D - 50W+50W, 2x8"
13956 - Marshall AS50D - 50W, 2x8"
15059 - Marshall AS50D RED - 50W, 2x8"
4976 - Roland AC33 30W - 1x5"
9358 - Roland AC33, Rosewood
11129 - Roland AC40 Acoustic Guitar Amplifier
6505 - Roland AC60 Acoustic Amp - 30w, 2x6.5
15627 - Roland AC60 Acoustic Amp - 30w, 2x6.5
15628 - Roland AC60 Acoustic Amp - 30w, 2x6.5
9383 - Roland AC60 Acoustic Guitar Combo, RW
5597 - Roland AC90 - 90W, 2x8"
5574 - Roland Cube Street 2.5+2.5W, 6.5
14371 - MOBILE AC Acoustic Chorus, Portable Amp
0000 - Tanglewood - 4 Models in Stock Now
10937 - Yamaha THR5A Acoustic Amp

Ukuleles

12564 - Barnes & Mullins BJ306 6-String Banjo
4371 - Barnes & Mullins UBJ1 Banjo Ukulele
0000 - Baton Rouge - 10 Models in Stock Now
15147 - Blue Moon Tenor Ukulele Pear-Shaped
15398 - Deering Goodtime Tenor Banjo Ukulele
14557 - Deering Goodtime Ukulele Banjo
9081 - Fender Mino'Aka Concert Ukulele
5310 - Fender Nohea Tenor Ukulele
13616 - Fender Piha'ea Soprano Ukulele
12800 - Kala KA-BNJ/BK-C Concert Banjo Ukulele
9345 - Kala U Bass Electro Ac In Solid Mahogany
8127 - Kala U Bass in Mahogany
4722 - Kala U-Bass 2 Electro Acoustic Ukulele
15597 - Kohala Polycarbonate Concert Uke Electro
15595 - Kohala Polycarbonate Concert Ukulele
13978 - Laka Concert Ukulele with GigBa g
13979 - Laka Soprano Ukulele with Case
0000 - Luna - 9 Models in Stock Now
10372 - Magic Fluke M10 Concert Ukulele, Natural
13883 - Magic Fluke M30 Flea Sop Uke, Mahogany
12224 - Martin & Co C1K Koa Concert Ukulele
8128 - Martin S1 Soprano Ukulele with Gig Bag
15593 - Martin T1K Tenor Ukulele
15457 - Mya-Moe USA Beansprout Banjo Uke, Used
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8515 - Ohana BK20 Baritone Ukulele
12610 - Ohana BK22 Baritone Ukulele
12609 - Ohana BKB35E Bass Ukulele
13633 - Ohana CK15BK Concert Ukulele, Black
13634 - Ohana CK15BL Concert Ukulele, Blue
9050 - Ohana CK20CE Concert Uke
8513 - Ohana CK50MG Concert Ukulele
8508 - Ohana PK10S Soprano Ukulele Pineapple
13636 - Ohana SK10YW Soprano Uke, Matte Yellow
13644 - Ohana SK12 Soprano Ukulele
4711 - Ohana SK20S Soprano Ukulele Uke
14210 - Ohana SK21M Premium Mahogany Sopranino
13626 - Ohana SK22 Soprano Ukulele
8517 - Ohana SK22Z Sop Ukulele Zebrawood B&S
13642 - Ohana SK23 Soprano Ukulele
4710 - Ohana SK25 Soprano Ukulele
14211 - Ohana SK70BA Spruce & Black Applewood
14508 - Ohana SK70L Soprano Ukulele
14212 - Ohana SK70WG Soprano Uke, Willow B & S
12390 - Ohana Soprano Uke Gig Bag
13311 - Ohana Concert Uke Gig Bag
13312 - Ohana Tenor Uke Gig Bag
13310 - Ohana Baritone Uke Gig Bag
5009 - Ozark Ukulele Banjo
12740 - ResoVille Weeki Wachee Resonator Ukulele
10384 - Risa Electric Soprano Ukulele, UKS363MP
10385 - Risa UKS385MP Solid Concert Electro Uke
15476 - Risa Tenor Ukulele Electric Tenor-Uke
15549 - Risa UKELP363CS LP-Style Soprano Uke
10424 - Uluru Lehua I Soprano Ukulele
15385 - Vintage Banjo Ukulele, Used
12376 - Yamaha GL1 Guitalele
15618 - Yamaha GL1 Guitalele, Black
15621 - Yamaha GL1 Guitalele, Tobacco Brown

Travel & Tenor Guitars

8846 - Ashbury AT-14 Tenor Guitar
8851 - Ashbury AT24 Tenor Guitar
15434 - Ashbury Tenor Guitar, Flamed Oak
13550 - Eko Mini Evo EQ Travel Guitar In Natural
15344 - Faith Nomad Mini Neptune
15345 - Faith Nomad Mini Saturn
15500 - Fender Sonoran 3/4 Mini Acoustic Guitar
14473 - Luna Safari Henna 3/4 Size Travel Guitar
14472 - Luna Safari Starry Night 3/4 Travel Guitar
15432 - Luna Safari Tattoo
5835 - Martin Backpacker Acoustic Travel Guitar
13324 - Martin LX Red Little Martin
10497 - Martin LX Red Little Martin
7115 - Martin LX1 Little Martin
7320 - Martin LX1E, Electro Travel Guitar
9588 - Tanglewood TW15 Baby All Solid Travel
14628 - Tanglewood TWJLJ, Travel Guitar
14522 - Yamaha SLG200S Silent Guitar, Steel
7121 - Gitane Cigano GJ-0, Oval Hole, Natural
7122 - Gitane D500 Gypsy Jazz, Natural GR52066
7216 - Gitane DG255 Gypsy Jazz Guitar in Nat
9805 - Gitane DG300 Gypsy Jazz Guitar In Nat
14912 - Gitane Gitane Reinhardt Guitar
7120 - Gitane Cigano GJ5 Gypsy Jazz, Natural
9299 - Peerless Martin Taylor Maestro
15503 - Dimavery RS300 Resonator Guitar, Used
14615 - Dobro, circa 1975, Original Vintage
14530 - Gibson Dobro USA Made Resonator, Used

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THE CADILLAC THREE

WORDS: JULIAN PIPER IMAGES: JILLIAN J & DAVID MCCLISTER

With an unlikely blend of Hank Williams and Nirvana as influences, the Cadillac Three guitarist Jaren Johnston explains the unusual genesis of Nashville's hottest barn burning act

"It's like wanting to move to LA to become an actor; kids come here every day and want to be a country star. They come to Nashville with a shitty little Epiphone guitar and a cowboy hat, and end up waiting tables for 20 years and never work. But there are one or two it does work for. It's that never ending passion that you have to have, to get up at dawn and write as many songs as you can with whoever you can... and have a lot of luck."

Jaren Johnston, guitarist with the Cadillac Three, laughs as he lays bare the ragged underbelly of Nashville existence. And as he'll be the first to admit – along with his two high school friends, drummer Neil Mason and lap steel player Kelby Ray – he's been luckier than most. The band's album *Bury Me In My Boots* immediately debuted on Billboard's Top Country album charts at number five. After touring with ZZ Top, Johnston now counts the Rev'd Billy Gibbons among his friends, the band have toured Europe 10 times, and can, it seems, do no wrong.

Which is all the more surprising, when you consider that on the face of it, the Cadillac Three aren't doing anything new; the songs all extol the familiar Southern mythology about chicks in faded jeans and getting wasted on moonshine in, as Johnston sings in 'The South', a place where 'the beer seems colder and the women seem hotter.'

Also consider the lyric: 'You put the sex in sexy, you put the bang in banging', from 'Hot

Damn'. It's the kind of stuff Lynryd Skynyrd first dished out 40 years ago. But there's no doubt that the Cadillac Three's lyrics and infectious hook lines would be the envy of Skynryd and every band that's followed in their slip stream.

"We're like Black Sabbath on cornbread!" Johnston declares. "But country is the last real genre where you'll hear a good story, and those ideas are still currency, they're just my own life experiences. I wrote our first record in a week, and just wanted to write about growing up and where we're from – that unique, slow mindset. It all went along with the grooves we were writing, which were very sludgy and southern; it felt like we were sitting on our back porch and playing it as slow as we possibly could.

"In the last three and a half years we've travelled the world, but when we come home it's still the same thing – the relaxed feel. I turn the phone off… don't want to hear any bullshit. In the South everyone holds onto that laidback feel, wears that chip on their sleeve, 'Yeah, this where I'm from'. But New Yorkers do the same thing, they have that chip about 'Yeah, I'm from New York and you'll never be as good as me.' A lot of people do that."

With a father who played drums on the *Grand Ole Opry*, Johnston grew up in a home where Hank Williams came with the Corn Flakes, and the only cash around was Johnny. "Just seeing my dad when I was a kid, and the way he was, was very influential. When I was 12 or 13 years old, I would see him go off to play drums at night, and then in the daytime he'd be pitching songs and hassling; that's the way to make a living in this town. And he always said, 'You can make a living playing drums' – I was a drummer too at that point – 'but if you really want to do something, you gotta get out there and write some songs.' He was always very encouraging."

Johnston took the advice, and though he's modest about his successes, country stars like Kenny Chesney and Dierks Bentley have enjoyed huge success with covers of his songs.

"Growing up in Nashville with my dad's background, gave me a little bit of an 'in' at the start, but it was because I tended to lean more towards the Southern thing, that people started taking notice," he admits. "I got my first publishing deal in 2005, I was making 35,000 dollars and they were paying me to turn in 10 songs a year at least. That was a big deal, because I'm one of those writers that writes 300 songs a year, and when I got that job, I was able to quit waiting tables and really concentrate on my craft; it changed everything. All of a sudden I was professional, and someone was paying me for what I did. It was like leaving high school and wanting to go to college; suddenly you're in the biggest college in the world. Within two years I began getting some big artists covering my songs, and at the same time I was forming my band.

"It took me 20 years," he adds, "and a lot of my friends that started out about the same time gave up and had kids. They gave up on that dream, but I never did. You have to commit to

it. I don't know whether that makes it easier or harder, but it's all about the passion.

"When I told my dad about that first deal, we cried on the phone. He knew how tough it is. There're two huge music business schools in town, and everyone comes to get that music business degree. But there're only six jobs a year available – maybe. I managed to get my songs to the right person, and by that time the band was starting up, stirring up a bit of trouble," he chuckles, "so we were like a double threat."

The Cadillac Three originally started out as American Bang, a punk influenced four-piece rock band, without a lap steel in sight. "When the rock thing hit me, and I heard bands like Metallica, Nirvana and Rage Against The Machine, as a rebellious teenager I just jumped into that world, and it's all that mixed together that formed what we do now. I never had a mission to try and merge the country and rock influences, I just wanted to play music, and the southern things always felt really natural to me," he says.

Watching the Cadillac Three tear it up onstage, with their hair hanging down from battered baseball caps, they might look like a bunch of guys from a redneck country band, but they owe more to Nirvana than Hank Williams – despite using a lap steel player in the trio rather than a more traditionally rock bass player.

"We've been playing some form of what we're doing, since we were 14 or 15 years old in high school. There were the three of us and we didn't want to just add some random guy, so we made a conscious decision to add lap steel, and base a lot of what we did around that and my heavier guitar thing with the open tunings.

"One of the first gigs we had as a trio in town was supporting ZZ Top. I said 'Let's just play it without a bass player', and hit on the idea of using my '59 Fender Bassman with the bass turned right up, and suggested to Kelby that he did the same on his side. We got through the show which was great, and Billy Gibbons came up after and was super excited about it: 'Man you guys, whatever you were doing is awesome, don't change a thing.' And he took us out on the road that summer, which is when we figured out the two channel split we now use. Kelby's running a frequency divider, programmed to pick up only the bottom strings on the bass side of the steel. That's when we knew we could go out as a three piece, and have a really cool sound. Mostly I have the guitar tuned to open D, sometimes open C or open F or G, with the lap steel in open D."

And although the Cadillac Three play acoustic shows, Johnston admits: "I'm a child of the 90s, so I'm a sucker for electric. I'm a big fan of getting heavy with it; it works a lot better when we're plugged in, and it's what makes us different. We use a big acoustic element in our recordings because we love the earthiness, and I write all our songs on acoustic guitars. I've got a couple of Gibson LGOs and LG2s, and a J45. It all depends upon what mood I'm in that day, but alternate tunings spark something that's a lot more fun. If you hear my record you can definitely hear my tricks – I've only got a couple!" ■

The Shires

WORDS: TOM VOCE **IMAGES:** GEORGE FAIRBAIRN

As they prepare to go stratospheric with their new album My Universe, the follow up to last year's UK top ten Brave, the Shires camp out in a West London hotel and chat a bit about their inexorable rise, playing arenas and learning to cheat on the acoustic guitar

The lift dings at the 15th floor, where current star country duo Ben Earle and Crissie Rhodes have parked themselves at a table in the hotel's lounge to talk about their huge new record, *My Universe*. The most noticeable difference between this new set and their debut is the sonic size and scope of the songs – more muscular and grown up than the ones on *Brave*. "The ambition was to have these bigger songs for the bigger shows," begins Earle. "We've played a lot of areas, with people like the Corrs and Tom Jones, and we've done a lot of festivals too, so it's great to have those bigger sounding songs. It's definitely a different skill, playing to all those thousands of people, so to have the tunes to back it up and get everybody going is really exciting."

"We started writing this just after *Brave* had been recorded," Rhodes says. "So it's been two years in the making really. It wasn't until the back end of last year through this year that we realised we needed to step it up and produce those anthemic songs that would fill an arena, alongside the more personal ballads."

"It hasn't really changed the songwriting process much," says Earle. "It was more the approach in the studio that was different this time round."

"Our producer Toby also worked on *Brave* with us, and on that album he wanted to put some production stuff like synths behind it and we said 'No, thanks'. But on this one we went: 'Let's put some on there now!' Only two years later," Rhodes grins.

But what a snowball the two Brits have been a part of since they met on Facebook three years back. Earle puffs his cheeks out: "It's just gone better than we could have imagined. We've recorded these two albums in Nashville, so it was like walking into a memory; we had the same band, same producer, and the same engineers. But what had changed was our confidence as a band," he continues, after a slight pause. "Last time it was all new to us, we didn't really know what we were doing and we didn't really know each other that well either!"

"We were quite green and a bit scared to have an opinion with all of these talented musicians in one room," Rhodes picks up. "They played incredibly well and were so professional, that asking them to play something a different way was quite daunting."

"It's different now," says Earle. "This time, when we walked in, it was just walking into a studio. It's a pretty wonderful studio, but it is

still just a studio, and we felt more comfortable all round really."

It must have been a jarring experience being flown to Tennessee to record a debut album in the music capital of the world, with a bunch of professional musicians at the ready to flesh out the duo's songs. "It just felt like Nashville was *the* place to go for us," Rhodes answers. "Going out there and getting that musicianship from guys who play music all day and everyday; they're amazing session musicians and we felt that we couldn't beat that here in the UK. And because we are from here and we're playing country music, it gave it a different spin for the guys out there who play so much country music. They really embraced our sound."

"We were so focused as well," says Earle. "When we were out there doing the albums, we were away from our lives, so there were no distractions; we were just there making music all week to get the album finished, so there was a discipline there too."

It all seems such a far cry for two musicians from Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire, sending each other fragments of tunes to test the water. "It's crazy," admits Rhodes. "For example, we went in to the studio for these sessions with an acoustic guitar line and a dodgy vocal over the top – not that we *ever* do dodgy vocals – that would become 'Beats To Our Rhythm', and they created this whole masterpiece just from that tiny demo. They chart the whole thing out and everyone takes a look at it and then off they go into this main room, count it in and go for a take. It's incredible and I don't think there are many places that do it like that anymore."

It's a valid point, especially given that these days particularly, musicians are keen to shun studio use entirely in favour of location recorded albums and songs on minimal hardware. "That's David Gray's fault, isn't it?" laughs Rhodes, as Earle cackles. "Didn't he start all of that bedroom studio recording? You see him on Instagram saying 'I'm in the studio today!' and the picture is his bedroom with a computer."

"It's a good thing though, in lots of ways," Earle suggests. "That's how our demos got heard by Decca and Radio 2; they were just bedroom recorded. But what you can't really get, and what I loved about our Nashville sessions, are the little moments of magic when people playing in a room together are so in sync that they give something their own personality and create a little bit of magic from nowhere.

"It's still amazing when we hear the band play our acoustic songs," he adds. "I remember the first time was just a 'wow' moment and we still feel so privileged; we know there aren't many musicians who get to be in this position."

"And it's great for the music industry too," Rhodes says. "There are these guys who spend thousands going through music college – so if all of the parts of a song are done separately or on a computer, how are those musicians going to make a living?"

Although size seems to be an important factor in the band's sound these days, what with the venues being of cathedral proportions, the pair are still careful to strip it back from six live members to just the two of them sometimes. "We tend to send the band off mid-set for their 'beer break'," grins Rhodes. "And then we just play some acoustic songs."

"Playing in a band is amazing," adds Earle. "Hearing the drums kick in and the crunch on the guitar is really exciting, but there is a lot more freedom when it's just us; a band still can feel regimented. And to me, the measure of any song or act is whether they can stand there with just a guitar or piano and sing. There's something really magical about two voices singing together, especially a male and a female."

"The crowd is interesting too in the acoustic moments," says Rhodes. "In the UK and parts of Europe, there is absolute silence during those songs; people really love to strip it right back and hear that honesty coming through. It seems to really work over here, but I think it can unnerve some American artists, who are more like, let's get a beer and get into it!"

"I think it's different, because over here we go to really watch music," Earle continues. "Over in the US and Canada people will chat and dance and have a good time, but it's less obviously about going to watch it. It's interesting how different cultures experience live music."

Going back to the beginning of the Shires, when was it that they realised they may have stumbled onto something significant as a duo? "It was kind of from the get-go," says Rhodes. "I can't quite remember what we sang first," says Ben. "I think it was 'Black and White'. I'd sent Crissie some songs, and that was one of them. So she came round the next day and, although it wasn't telepathic like it is now, it still felt right. It was really easy and we both felt it could work, but the main thing was the ambition; I remember saying to Crissie that I wanted this to be it."

> **"Our mantra has always been to do whatever the song needs, so it always comes back to the song, which is what country music is all about"**

"Your ambition was much bigger than mine at the time," Rhodes says. "I just wanted to sing a bit. I came from a country background, so I knew a lot of songs from singing at weddings and parties, whereas Ben was more business. I just thought I'd be a session singer, I never thought I'd be a pop star."

"We've always wanted the best," Earle adds. "Our mantra has always been to do whatever the song needs, so it always comes back to the song, which is what country music is all about. So Crissie might do a take that's amazing, but it might not be the right one for the song, or she might say a guitar part isn't quite right."

"Our energy is great," Rhodes continues. "We don't take anything personally, because it's about what the song needs, and that's why it's so easy between us."

What is less easy, as we all know, is starting out on the road to learning an acoustic instrument, as Rhodes is currently doing. "I'm learning guitar," she says, with a slight grimace. "But I'm not too good yet."

"I think you're pretty good," Earle chimes in, diplomatically. "You've picked it up way quicker than I did when I started out."

"I'm quite glad that I learned to sing first," she continues. "I sing very differently when I'm playing; it's quite soft and folky, compared to the strong vocals that I usually do. But I'm quite enjoying putting my four chords together on my Baby Taylor. It's good fun and really light, so I can take it anywhere."

Rhodes' musical other half has a slight head start on her, having been involved with instruments from a young age. "I started piano when I was about seven," Earle says. "And I picked up the guitar when I was about 13. I love the guitar, especially for writing and for all of the rhythms that you can't do on piano, but I like how visual the piano is and how you can translate that to the guitar. You understand things like playing a G chord over and E chord and how that works more on piano, because it's there in front of you. It's harder to learn the guitar just from chord shapes. But I love playing the guitar now, even more than the piano. ("And you love buying more guitars too..." Rhodes adds with a grin.) I wouldn't mind some electrics soon, but at the moment it's only acoustics I'm into," Ben states. "I started off with a Faith Venus, and from there I went to a Takamine, which I still have. After that I went onto Martins, with a 000X1AE, which is their basic model."

A sign of things having changed for the Shires can be read from how Ben's guitar collection has grown, as he almost shyly admits. "Now I have a Martin HD-28E Retro and a 000-18E Retro, both with the Fishman Aura Plus pickup systems."

"He's going to get a bigger house to accommodate them all this year," laughs Rhodes. "And we now have to take two vans touring, because of Ben and Charles's [band guitarist] guitars!"

"The thing is they have such personalities!" argues Earle, to Rhodes' crowing laughter. "I have the Dread in DADGAD and the 000 in standard and it makes them so different to use. I sometimes do the DADF#AD one too, but it's cheating."

"I've tuned mine down half a step now and I use a capo sometimes," says Crissie. "It's been a game-changer for me when I've been learning some new songs."

"That's a real Nashville thing," Ben teases. "They tune them down so when they play in bars, it's easier to do the F# instead of the G chord." ■

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GRANT NICHOLAS

WORDS: TOM VOCE **IMAGES:** RICHARD ECCLESTONE

Acoustic talks to Feeder's creative force Grant Nicholas about going solo, going acoustic and plugging back in again

You might not realise, especially given the recent release of the ninth album *All Bright Electric*, but the acoustic guitar has been integral to UK rock phenomenon Feeder for nearly a quarter of a century. Starting out their big-time career with a string of Brit rock hits before reflecting on the loss of drummer Jon Lee, and then returning from Nicholas' acoustic sabbatical with a *tour de force* of grunge for grown-ups, Feeder has never been without the inspiration and comfort of the acoustic.

If it's not always obviously clear by listening to Feeder's sounds, it's hard to overstate what an important role acoustic has for Nicholas. "I'm not gonna say that I wrote all the riffs on acoustic guitar, but a lot of the songs are written in that simple, old-school way. Some work better acoustically, but they all start like that." Far from being just a starting point, the all-warm-acoustic sound has been a feature of past hits – cast your mind back to the acoustic intro to 1997's breakthrough single 'High' – but today finds itself as the backbone to the solo album *Yorktown Heights* and even thoroughly infiltrating the optimistic and shiny *All Bright Electric*, Feeder's newest offering, set to be released in October.

"Riffs are great, and they can make a hit record, but a riff doesn't feel like a song to me. It can make a song great, but I need more than just a riff. It's the combination of the way the chords move and the vocal melody that can be surrounded by a riff." Sitting at his Treehouse Studio at his home in Crouch End, Nicholas is keen to show me the acoustics he uses to write and record – playing sequences that would have either spawned the layered huge fuzz sound of Feeder, or been left more exposed for the softer sounds of his solo album and the EP *Black Clouds*. Like any self-aware rockers of the 90s, Feeder's songs are never far away from a sensitive moment or an acoustic breakdown. "I always used to write the songs like that anyway. I don't just sit down and write loads of riffs, I'm more of a song guy, and then the riffs come with that."

It's worth remembering that the acoustic guitar has had an incredibly important role to play in rock. It may be seen by some today as a little bit of retro-cool, a hipster old-timey indulgence or an injection of 'authentic' Americana, but in reality it's been a rock tool since rock began. Google your favourite rock guitarist and just see how many choose to be photographed with acoustics. The wall-of-noise back to back with the acoustic sensitivity was certainly the clincher that got Feeder their first deal: "The head of Echo came to a gig at the Mean Fiddler in Harlesden. Our manager came backstage and said: 'You know that acoustic song, can you play it at the end of the set?' I was like, 'No, I haven't even got an acoustic.' I had to borrow some horrible Ovation from another band. It was a dog to play, but that clinched the deal for us – showing that we had that side."

In 2015 Nicholas released *Yorktown Heights*, the first solo outing coming after eight albums of Feeder and relentless touring. Far from being a time to relax and take a break, Nicholas used the time to carve out a new sound, find a new vocal style and take it out on the road. "I did *Yorktown Heights,* which I'm really proud of, and then I did *Black Clouds* because I felt like I just wanted to do more music. We did quite a lot of shows, so I wanted to introduce new songs and keep it interesting for us and for the people who were coming to see us."

Those hardcore fans will no doubt recognise the change in vocal style that the maturing Nicholas has initiated. "I think the solo thing gave me a bit more confidence vocally. I know it sounds weird when I've been doing it as long as I have, but I feel more comfortable with the way I'm singing since I did the solo records. I'm older now and your voice changes a bit.

"When I did my solo record out in Yorktown Heights in New York, my friend was a bit short on mic stands so he convinced me to do the vocals sat down. I was unsure, but he told me I'd use my voice in a different way. I ended up doing the whole record sat down and I got really used to it. I did the same with the new Feeder record, except for a couple of the backing vocals where I had to give it a bit of wellie." Dredging up a nearly forgotten factoid, I point out that Sharleen Spiteri from Texas used to record all her vocals lying down. "Really? I knew Jim Morrison did a few like that, but he had probably just passed out.

"I've always liked my voice," he adds. "But I've also always liked the crooner thing in rock. I'm not saying I want to sound like a lounge singer on every song, but I quite like the sound of those bands like the Doors and Johnny Cash – that kind of big voice."

Despite the change in technique and the switch to acoustic timbres, there's no mistaking that *Yorktown Heights* is a rock album. Rarely crunching out, nor relying only on ballads, it's both sensitive and powerful. If 2002's *Comfort In Sound* was the album that helped Nicholas express with noise what he needed to after drummer Jon Lee's devastating death, the songs of *Yorktown Heights* represent Nicholas finding a voice and sound that are helping him transition into another phase of the Nicholas/Feeder career, one which sees grief from farther away, and one which looks forward to getting older. "I think I've found a sound in the solo stuff that I'm going to continue to do for a while. It could be the sound for the rest of my career. I think it probably will be. Until I find a different sound!"

On acoustic sounds, Nicholas has a strong preference for old strings: "I hate acoustics with new strings. I love that really woody sound. I only change strings when I have to. Even my Jazzmaster. Those strings have been on there since the last Feeder record [Generation Freakshow, 2012]; that's how old they are."

Surprisingly, or perhaps not surprisingly at all, the new Feeder album *All Bright Electric* does not sound at all incongruous next to *Yorktown Heights*. They are two sides of the same coin, and share the same evolutionary spirit, as well as vocal approach. While it's cheekily satisfying to talk about an album called *All Bright Electric* in the pages of *Acoustic*, and mention the influence of bands like Black Sabbath, Nirvana, and the Smashing Pumpkins, it's worth pointing out once more that this kind of rock has always gone hand in hand with the acoustic.

"There's quite a lot of acoustic on the record, even on the heavy songs. What I do, even on the solo stuff to get more of a band sound, is split the DI into a Pete Cornish distortion, a very subtle one. I'll go for a mic very close to the hole. Though it's a small-bodied guitar, it's surprisingly bassy. It's a combination of that acoustic tracked with my Jazzmaster of the front pickup, played on the high octave on the electric. It's got that New Orleans-y vibe. That's totally what I had in my head. A dark Louisiana vibe. We did a gig in Louisiana. There are some pretty odd dudes down there."

Leaving behind the southern oddballs, Nicholas reveals yet more changes in his approach to his music: "There's loads of old-school stuff like Wurlitzers – I've always messed with that on Feeder stuff, but I've done it a lot more on this new Feeder record and on my solo stuff. I found ways of doing things that I really liked."

Talking to Nicholas, it's impossible to come away without being affected by his sense of enthusiasm, the sense that his acoustic works and the hopeful *All Bright Electric* are a starting point for something bigger. "It sounded like the perfect title for me. Some people said it sounded like a toothpaste. It is hopeful. I want people to know we're not living off past glories, we're making good music still. We'll always do that, otherwise, I don't want to do it." ■

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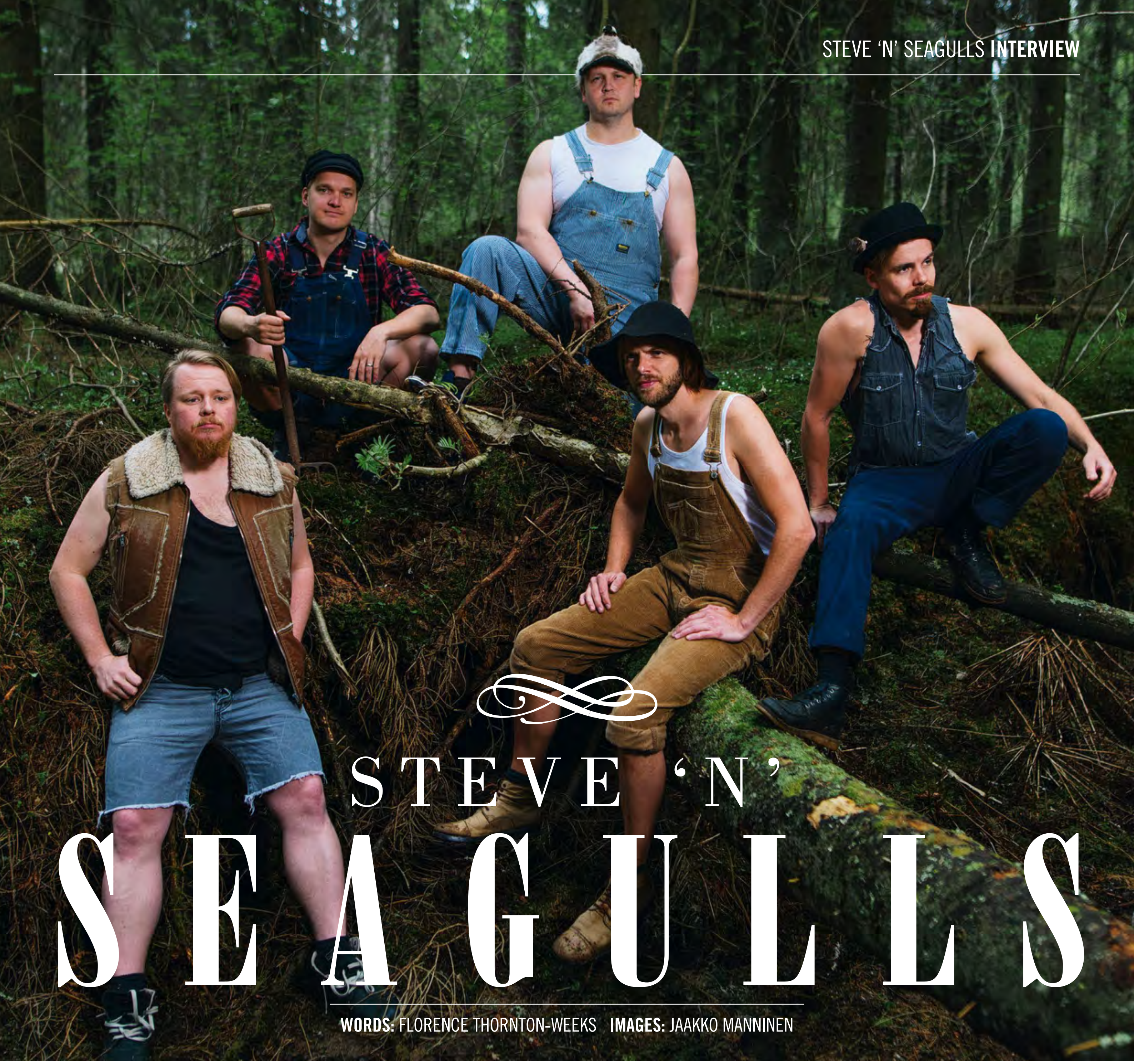


STEVE 'N' SEAGULLS

WORDS: FLORENCE THORNTON-WEEKS **IMAGES:** JAAKKO MANNINEN

How do you please both heavy metal and bluegrass fans at the same gig? Remmel and Herman of Steve 'N' Seagulls let Acoustic in on the secret

Finnish five-piece Steve 'N' Seagulls took the world by storm when they began uploading their bluegrass renditions of metal anthems to YouTube. Three years later and they've just released their second album *Brothers In Farms* and are touring the world, but how did they get here?

As far as social media goes, YouTube has done more for aspiring musicians than any other platform – and Steve 'N' Seagulls can count their rise to fame among the success stories. They began uploading videos of them "messing around" with some of their favourite metal and rock songs about three years ago when banjo player, guitarist and vocalist Herman (the band all employ mononyms), joined the line up. "It was just something we wanted to do to introduce the band," he says, "and then, suddenly, it just took off."

But, with the help of some metal loving webpages sharing their videos and several record labels hunting them down, their transition from online content to producing an album was natural. "Recording in the studio is like a birthday for a musician because live music is obviously just there and then it doesn't exist anymore," says Remmel, the band's other acoustic guitar player and vocalist.

On their second album, Remmel says, the guys were keen to push themselves in the studio. "This time we played all the instrumentation live and then we did the vocals on top because we wanted to have the pressure and energy of live music. We took a song and we started playing it over and over and over again until we felt like 'OK, it's here, let's record.'"

Despite putting perhaps unnecessary pressure on themselves in the studio, the pair say they never felt the burden of the second album. "We wanted to create something with more variety and more energy and attack to it, so we were actually really happy to start working on the

second album," Herman says. "Of course there was pressure there because the YouTube videos took off so quickly and you never know if this is going to go the same way, but we have been touring a lot in Europe this summer and the feedback from the audience has been really good."

Given the juxtaposition of the songs the band cover, with the way they style them, it is difficult to picture, without being there, what a Steve 'N' Seagulls audience would look like. They initially garnered the respect of the metal fans who loved the original versions of the tracks they covered, but playing on traditional country and bluegrass instruments, you might think that they put losing that fan base at risk. Likewise with country lovers wanting to appreciate them for their country stylings, but struggling to accept the source material. Remmel tells us that their audience is "whoever comes to see them live," and that they are inspired by such a diverse range of musicians, from Megadeth to Hank Williams, that there are elements of different styles in everything they do. "People who come to see us might love really hardcore metal or really folky bluegrass but they come together with us and love it," he says.

Oh, and you can also expect a lot of wolf head hats in homage to the band's larger than life accordion, kantele, mandolin, keys and flute player Hiltunen, who sports one in the band's videos and during their gigs.

"We have been asked a lot if we are a humour band, but it's serious. We work really hard on the band, and it's more about having fun with instruments and having fun with music than making fun of the songs or making fun of anybody… except maybe ourselves," says Remmel.

Taking a well known song and 'making it your own' seems to be the thing at the moment, but the Seagulls aren't just slowing down a dance track and turning it into a love song – they are flipping genre on its head and producing music that conjures an entirely different atmosphere to the original. "A good riff or a good melody works with any kind of instrument," Remmel says. "In our band, the banjo has become pretty aggressive as Herman has a non-traditional style, and for an acoustic band we have a pretty rocking drum kit!"

Traversing the stylistic universe does have its complications however, and they say it is all too easy to fall into the trap of picking songs that they like rather than ones that will work best in their style. "The song has to have something around the core like a good melody or a good riff. Usually somebody says, 'I just ran into this old song and I started messing around with it and

I have this idea. What do you think?" Then the ideas start from there. At some point we either notice that it's going to work or that it sounds terrible and we will have to skip it. There are maybe 30 or 40 songs that we really tried to love but that just didn't work out," says Remmel.

Just because they are onto a winning song doesn't mean the decisions stop there. All members are multi-instrumentalists, so there are countless ways to bring the song to life. "We find new instruments, learn how to play them and instantly go on stage with them," Remmel says. "I think one of the good things about this band is that we are on the total verge of collapsing with our instruments." He means it as well. In one set, the band will dip in and out of guitar, banjo, upright bass, flute, accordion, mandolin, and anything else they can manage to fit on the stage. Couple this with the fact that four of the band members are singers and there is a lot of fun to be had with the compositions. "We really enjoy playing all these different instruments together and I think it shows in the live gigs," Remmel adds, "there is a lot of energy and a feeling of danger all the time."

And the kit they have on stage is the same as that on the album. "We have a little more variety with the mandolins and acoustic guitars in the studio. So if we wanted a different feel to it or a specific colour or to try different tunings, we grab a different instrument," Herman explains, "but basically we travel with the same acoustics, banjos and mandolins and it's basically the exact same stuff we use in the studio."

Of course this isn't without some complications, as the band recently discovered the hard way when they came to collect their kit from the belt at an airport. "We saw the case and we just thought, 'Oh my god, the banjos are going to be totally broken.' I don't know how someone can manage to do that much damage to a hard case!" Luckily, the Seagulls' kit came away mostly unscathed thanks to some clever casing, which goes to show that it's worth investing in those good travel cases.

Being able to watch the bluegrass rockers on YouTube in between albums really helps keep the buzz alive, but they are keen to keep the albums coming. Next time, we can expect a lot more originals as well. "On *Brothers In Farms* we were working on maybe four or five originals, but only one that we thought was good enough," says Remmel. "Maybe in the future it would be more like 50/50." ■

Steve 'N' Seagulls' *Brothers In Farms* is out now. The band begin a UK tour on 14 November.

RODRIGO Y

WORDS: TERI SACCONE **IMAGES:** RICHARD ECCLESTONE

Mexican guitar duo Rodrigo y Gabriela smash the templates of metal and classical guitar, reconfiguring them into a fiery, hybrid sound. Acoustic sat down with the duo as they reflected on their past

For the uninitiated: Gabriela Quintero and Rodrigo Sanchez started out playing heavy metal in their native Mexico before relocating to Dublin in 1999. They began by busking but then broke internationally thanks to the millions of views the YouTube videos illustrating their enormously emotive guitar playing racked up.

By the time they returned to reside in their homeland in 2007, they were established stars in both Europe and USA. Rodrigo is the melodic player of the two, Gabriela the percussive wonder – her dazzling right hand technique blending intricate fingerstyle playing with propulsive percussion. Rodrigo meanwhile writes most of the melodies and wields a plectrum to play monster riffs and melodic solos, leaving Gab to create the song structures based on Rod's melodies.

First things first: please don't mistakenly label them as folk, Latin or, most egregiously, flamenco – although they are influenced by all of those – as the only genre they both feel comfortable with is rock.

"People still confuse our music with flamenco music, probably because we play nylon-string guitars and there is an influence," Gabriela says. "Another misconception is that we play traditional Mexican style, which it isn't either. It's far from it. But we now kind of understand that people will think or believe what they want to about our music."

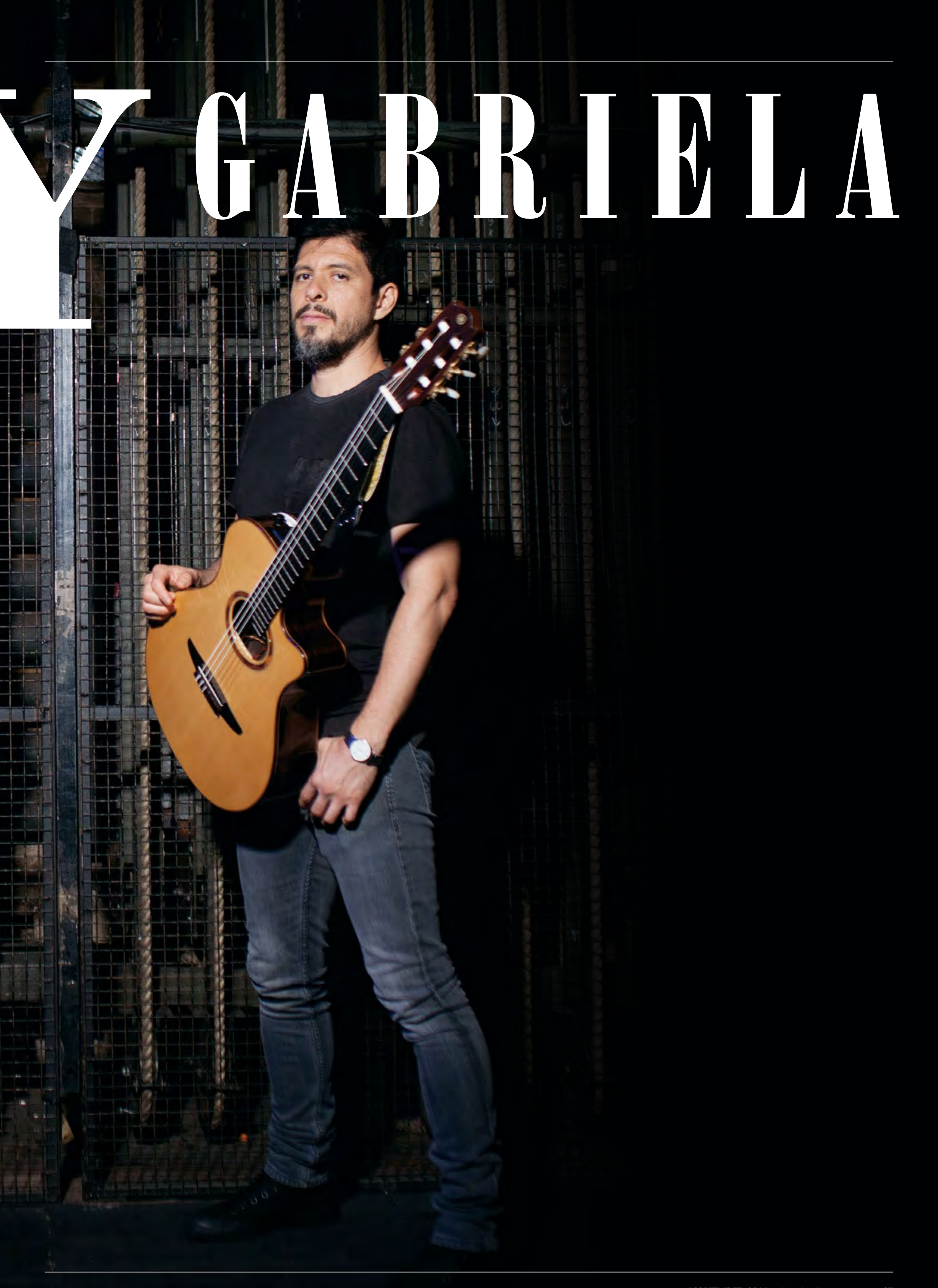
Still, it rankles Rodrigo, as he explains: "We just did a tour of 23 countries in just two months but we purposely chose countries we'd never been to before and it was really good. We went to places like Argentina, Chile, Lithuania and other Eastern European countries but in some places they wrote in the music press that we play 'flamenco!'"

Going back to the beginning of their aforementioned musical odyssey: they left Mexico for Ireland where they spent eight years which was prompted by their inability to land a recording deal.

"Our metal band Tierra Acida didn't break through," Gabriela explains, "and we decided that our chances of getting a record deal were non-existent after chasing one for years. We picked Dublin as we knew someone living there and figured it would be a new start moving so far away. We didn't speak English yet and figured we'd start there and if it didn't work out we'd move elsewhere in Europe. It was cold but people were very friendly and we just immediately became street performers. Before we left home we decided to sell all of our electric instruments and travel with two cheap acoustic guitars rather than pay to move all our gear over there. We were much younger, and we ended up busking for about four years. It was actually great! We made a good living there, and then our music started happening more organically. I guess we set ourselves free from chasing the record deal dream. Instead we just focused on our music and we enjoyed it much more without the added pressure."

Ironically Rodrigo was the aspiring drummer as a child, whereas Gab became the percussive player of the duo and only ever wanted to play guitar. "It's interesting and that was an accident in a way," he explains. "We wondered the best way to cover the sounds we wanted to make. Coming from a metal background we wanted a big sound but we didn't want a full band. So we developed a technique by accident. But I think we complement each other."

Reflecting, what does Rodrigo think has been his biggest challenge over the last 20 years he's played with Gabriela?



Y GABRIELA

"Going from electric to acoustic was difficult. It's a different world for any player to make that switch. To learn how to do the right palm mutings but make it still sound heavy took a while, and I know how hard it is for other electric players to switch over and make acoustic heavy. Growing up I listened to everyone from Kirk Hammett and James Hetfield of Metallica to Paco de Lucia and Vicente Amigo, even Argentine tango music," he says, "so my influences are varied."

When Gabriela was a child she was drawn to the acoustic guitar because of its "sound, and portability" and although she worked tirelessly to get to the point she's at today, there was never any question about her ability to play guitar.

"That technique was almost completely inspired by flamenco music," she explains. "I've always been thrilled by the way flamenco players play rhythms with their right hand – it's so incredible. I didn't have any clue how to do it at all. Eventually, I met a flamenco player who taught me one movement, and that was it. I practised it a lot and tried to copy what other flamenco players did, but I never got it right. Nowadays, I still don't know how they do it. I'm very rocky in comparison, much more aggressive."

Both are Yamaha players with signature guitars designed for their unique needs. Although Rodrigo is fluent in both acoustic and electric, he has always leant more towards rhythm playing and players. "I have many electrics at home and have my big amps and Marshalls. But as an electric guitarist I'm more of a rhythm player and I always preferred riffing rather than lead."

Both are huge metal fans – Pantera, Testament, Metallica and Megadeth are top favourites – and they perceive metal as a global genre that is truly omnipresent everywhere in the world.

"Metal music is the only real music that unites the world and the only music that even in Islamic countries you will find that unifies so many types of people young and old," says Gabriela.

The pair are currently developing music for what will become their sixth studio album. Rodrigo recognises the maturation of himself as a person and a songwriter: "You have to get more life experience and become mature to do that better and I think we're in a good place in our career and we hope that the next album will show that."

On the topic of their next album, Gabriela explains that they will be stepping out of their comfort zone a bit, "We plan to have people from different backgrounds on the new album," she says. "Most of our albums

have been a concept but this will be more about a variety: instrumentals, cover versions, thrash metal versions, and four songs with vocals. So it's very eclectic."

Rodrigo and Gabriela have been singing a song or two live at each show of late and there will be vocals from them as well as guests on the next album too. "In the past, singing didn't feel comfortable, but now we are ready," Rodrigo says. "I'm not a singer but I can sing on the album, plus we will have guests singing too. For the last two years we've both sung a bit at every show and that has given us the confidence to do that. We finally found the stuff we feel is cool enough to release. We don't want to sound super different than before though. We're not gonna sing every song we release but maybe if our audience likes it we can include vocals on every album."

"We wanted to really take our time with this album because in the past, we were rushing things," says Gabriela. "I think we started the process of the next one about a year ago with all the music we demoed. And maybe we won't record any of the music we made but we want to have those choices. We want to have a good selection of music to choose from."

The duo contributed music for mainstream films – including instalments in the *Shrek* and *Pirates of the Caribbean* franchises – so are there pressures for them to become more commercial to gain wider acceptance?

"I think if we go commercial we will lose our core audience," Rodrigo replies. "We recently rejected songs from a big name producer, which undoubtedly would have been very commercial for us. We have a beautiful career, though: we travel all over the world and play big venues so why should we look for commerciality? We don't want to spoil this."

They both reside in Ixtapa, Mexico, where, when not touring, Gabriela runs a vegan-friendly co-operative for local people to live and eat more sustainably (www.ecovegana.com) and Rodrigo plays football with a local team. Ironically, they are not as famous in their homeland as they are outside of it. "We don't have huge media attention there," says Rodrigo. "We play 5,000 seaters elsewhere but in Mexico play smaller places."

A couple of years ago Gabriela suffered a shoulder injury which sidelined her for a bit. "It came from my shoulder/back muscle after playing 190 gigs a year, and it may have come from anxiety. So I went to a physiotherapist and he said 'You need to rest.' which I resisted. So I went to around 17 different physios who all agreed I needed rest. I finally realised I needed to rest! We had to cancel a

whole tour but I needed to rest. The muscles were very tense. Sometimes it's stressful being in airports and on planes where you feel tense in your muscles. Now I'm OK."

Travelling may be tiring at times but being on the road is Rodrigo's favourite aspect of music-making. "I think touring is my favourite thing. It's a challenge at times and that's when I play my best and I have to work hard and really bring my best to the shows so that's never boring."

And Gabriela's career highlights? "Most everything," she replies. "We didn't expect such great success so it feels out of the blue until I review all the work we put in to get to this point. We started to create this style, started travelling, and the highlight has been being able to do this for 20 years. We have loved touring, playing the White House, and sharing the stage with friends like Robert Trujillo [Metallica]. So the career we've had is one big highlight."

It's no secret that for several years the duo were involved romantically. They have now separated and Rodrigo tells me their artistic pairing is on better ground than ever before. Gabriela is optimistic about the future prospects of her creative partnership with Rodrigo: "There are a lot of things that are still pouring out naturally from our hearts," she adds. "Guitar is a whole world of its own and I think it's really limitless." ■

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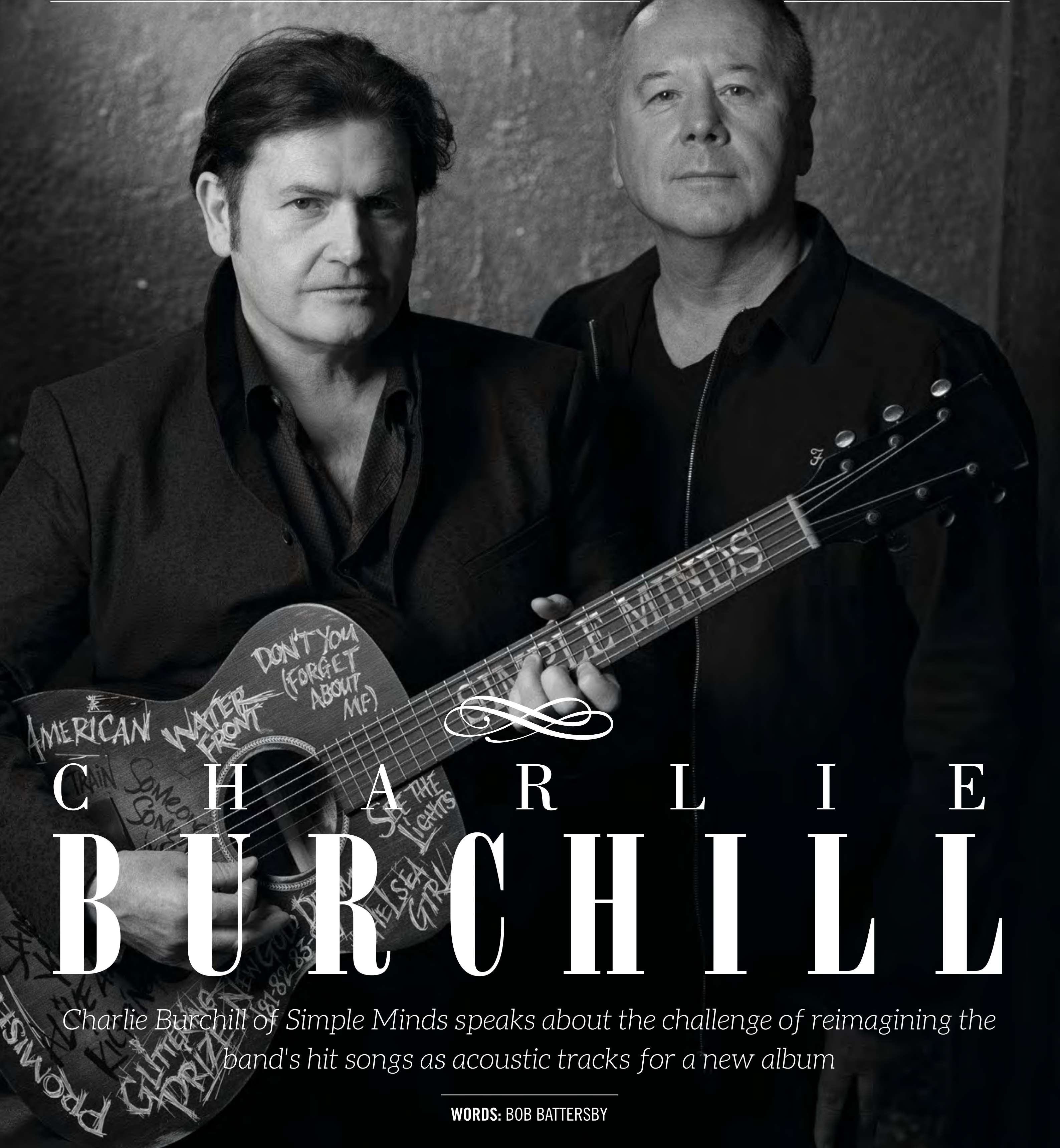

CHARLIE BURCHILL

Charlie Burchill of Simple Minds speaks about the challenge of reimagining the band's hit songs as acoustic tracks for a new album

WORDS: BOB BATTERSBY

Simple Minds, stadium darlings for decades, are not a band you immediately associate with acoustic music. Soaring synths, pounding bass and choppy chords on a Les Paul, while Jim Kerr wrestled his mic stand, were the sights and sounds that filled venues around the world.

But behind those anthemic chords is a man who discovered his love of guitar playing by trying to work out Joni Mitchell songs, by ear, on a guitar bought for him with coupons his mum saved from Embassy cigarette (remember those?) packets.

Charlie Burchill, school friend of Jim Kerr, co-founder of Simple Minds and co-writer of some of the defining songs of the 1980s, arrives at a West London recording studio and greets everyone with a warm smile and a welder's handshake. This is a powerfully built man who grew up in the Gorbals, and still has a strong Glasgow accent, but today we are going to see his softer side and talk acoustic guitars and the band's new album *Simple Minds Acoustic*.

With Jim and Charlie about to tour Germany backed by a symphony orchestra, the obvious question was why now for a stripped down acoustic album?

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"Our European labels, especially in Italy and Germany, had been on at us for ages to do it but we didn't want to do a 'here's versions of the tracks,' just pared down," he says with throaty laugh. "We call it 'bongos on the beach' and for a long time we resisted!"

However, after playing a three-song set in 2014 on Chris Evans' Radio 2 show with just Jim Kerr on vocals with Charlie and his brother Mark on acoustic guitars, they decided that they would do something acoustic-based.

"Normally you would have a track list of what might, or might not, work, but Jim said that maybe we should stretch ourselves." With that in mind, Charlie took a look at their back catalogue. "We had this body of work, so I mocked up versions of tracks and gave them a different angle. Then we started adding tracks that we thought might work. 'Chelsea Girl', a track Jim and I wrote in about 1977 was one of those. There were some tracks, like 'New Gold Dream' that should never have worked. 'Waterfront' was another one but we gave it a bit more of a Celtic feel and…" he pauses and smiles. "We agonised over this, you know, doing songs that had been done before, but we really deconstructed them, creating versions of these songs that were genuinely different. I think we have achieved that with quite a few of them. There's a track, 'Someone Somewhere in Summertime' (from 1982's *New Gold Dreams*), which has a totally darker feel to the original."

"I started learning ragtime, so I got a bit more technical with the finger picking, but I never got stuck with any technique as such, just how I felt and what I felt worked with the tuning"

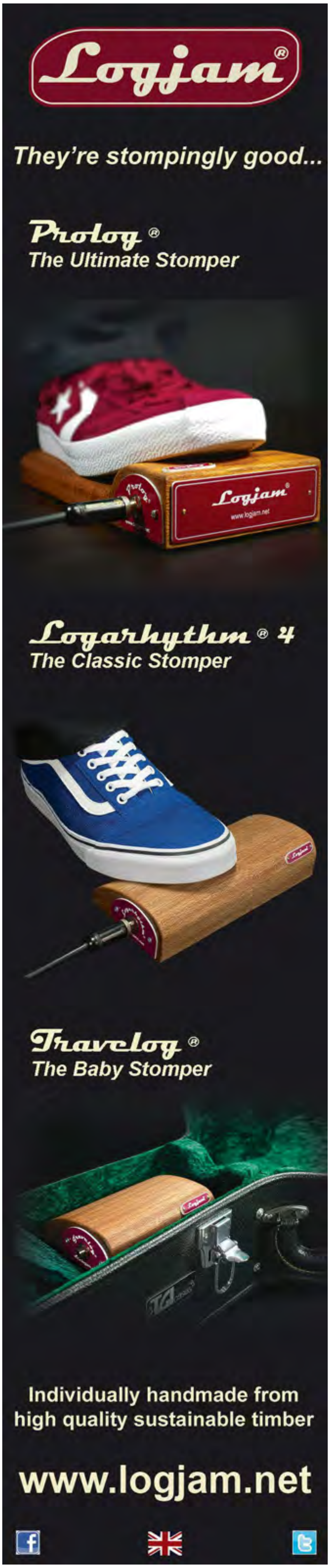
A standout track from the new album is a reworking of 'Promised You A Miracle' featuring KT Tunstall on vocals and guitar. "She's amazing," Burchill says. "She's a special talent. We had met her a couple of times. She's such a talent and in the studio with her she just took over. I still think of her as a young artist but she's really mature and she's done her 10,000 hours and she's been around for ages."

Not surprisingly there is also a re-working of 'Don't You (Forget About Me)', the song that broke the band in America after it was used in the movie *The Breakfast Club*. Charlie recalled how bizarre he found it, back in 1985, that they selected a Scottish band for a quintessentially American coming of age movie and then shot the video in an English stately home. It was all a long way from the Gorbals.

Talking of which, and getting back to the new album, he adds: "Where we recorded some of this album was in Gorbals Sound, which is a studio in the same building where Jim and I did our first ever gig. The first time we ever stood on a stage was in this place playing to orphans," he laughs, "we played 10 Velvet Underground songs. So it's full circle."

For the photoshoot he has brought along a few favourites from his expansive collection so, naturally, we get down to the nitty gritty. "On acoustics I use .11-.52s, although on electric I use .10-.47s, Elixirs on both," he says, before moving on to list performers who inspired him to practise in those early years. "I grew up with Bob Dylan, Joni Mitchell, Neil Young and we even had Loudon Wainwright III albums. My brother is four years older than me and he played a bit of guitar as well. One of my biggest acoustic heroes was David Bowie – the first guitar I ever wanted was a 12-string… I just wanted a blue 12-string."

He lists a few other early influences: Paul Simon, "he's an amazing guitar player"; Leonard Cohen; John Martyn, "he was amazing… that voice. We met him a couple of times, but it was more his sound, the echoes, that sort of thing that interested me," but the inspiration that he keeps returning to is Joni Mitchell, both as a guitarist and a songwriter.



© Bob Battersby

Joni leads us on to tunings. "Years ago I was a big fan of Joni Mitchell, and I was always trying to figure out her songs. I came across a tuning that I thought was a tuning that she used on this track, 'For The Roses', and it wasn't but actually it was a fantastic tuning for me. I use that quite often when we are in the studio." He uses this tuning, EAEGAE, on 'Light Travels' a song from 2009's *Graffiti Soul* and the most recent song to be given the acoustic treatment. "There are quite a lot of drop Ds on this album. The other one that I use, but it's really a bizarre one, is CGDGAD, although none of the tracks on the album are using that."

For a player one associates with Gretsch and Les Paul electric guitars, he rarely uses a pick when playing acoustically, preferring fingers and an open hand, fanning style of strumming. This technique developed from playing, courtesy of Joni Mitchell again, a lot of songs with low tunings. "Your whole technique has to change," he explains, "the strings are so floppy when A goes down to an F and she just feather strokes."

As a self-taught musician, who spent hours working out tunes from listening to albums, he's tried various styles over the years. "I started learning a bit of ragtime – I always loved Steve Howe – so was getting a bit more technical with the finger picking, but I never got stuck with any technique as such, just how I felt and what I felt worked with the tuning. So I would learn what I had to, but it was my way of doing it."

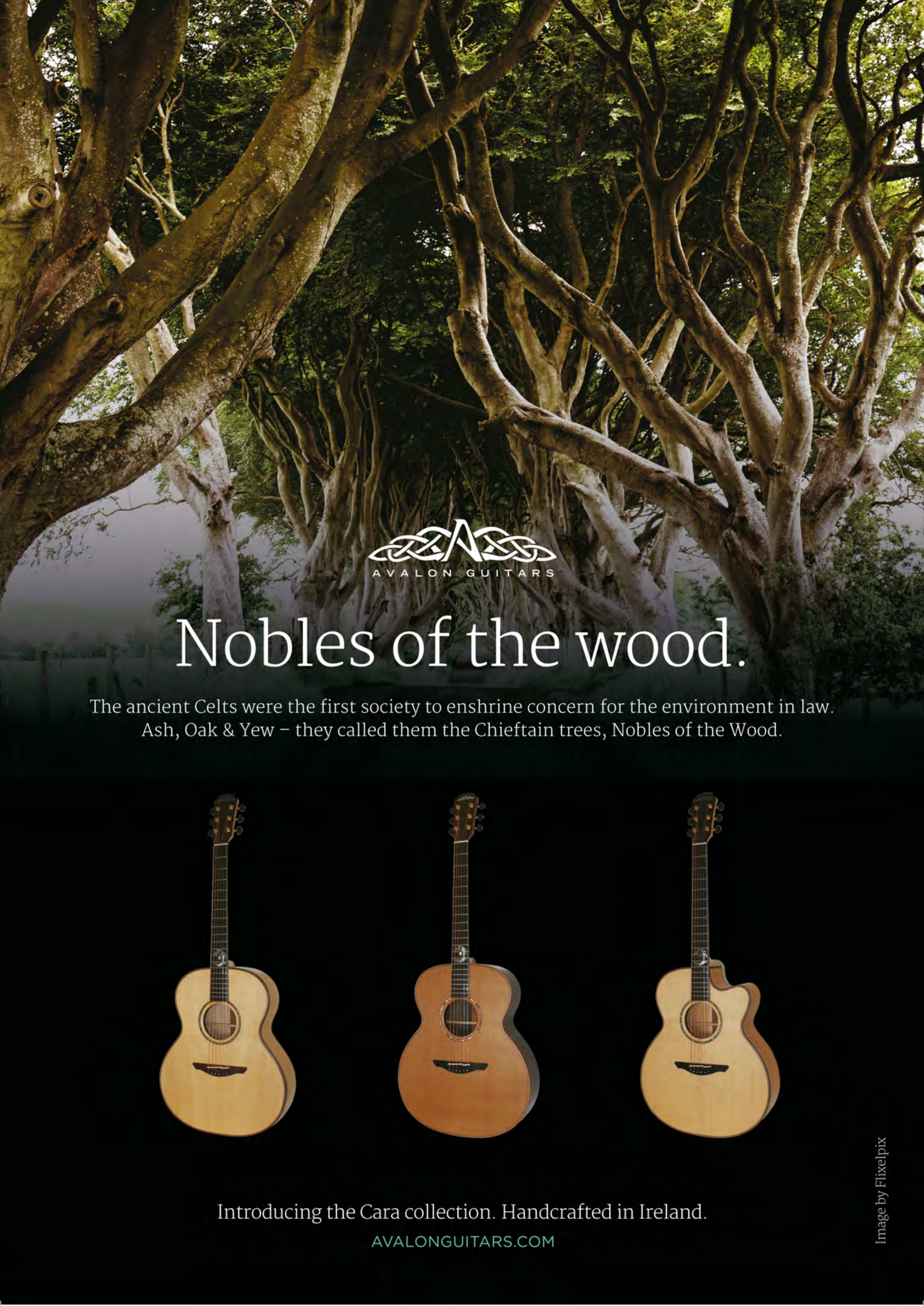
For the acoustic album he chose a varied selection of guitars from his collection. "The main one I used was a 1964 Gibson Hummingbird. Also a Dove – a 1990 but it's a great one – a 1970 flat top Martin and the 1970 Gibson J200. There's also a bit of old Dobro in there and my 12-string Guild on 'See The Lights'. There's quite a bit of 12-string buried in the album. You might think that it was chorus or something but it's actually a 12-string," he laughs.

Other favourites include a British-made Manson 12-string, a Dinsdale archtop, a Lowden, a Gurian from the USA, several Gibson J45s and a Japanese Yairi 12-string.

Finally, the question that every musician has an answer to: any guitars you wish you had never sold or which someone 'borrowed' and never returned?

"I had three guitars, Gibsons, that I had stolen – well they went missing, let's put it that way – one was a black Les Paul, it was a 1969, one was a Barney Kessel which, was a 1965, and one Chet Atkins acoustic electric 12-string. Those three went missing and I'm sure that they are out there somewhere. It's a mystery this thing, but it was a killer, the '69 Les Paul I had used on so many records and it was a beauty." ■

***Simple Minds Acoustic* out via Caroline International on 11 November.**
www.simpleminds.com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LOU RHODES

Lou Rhodes, previously known for her work with Lamb, has carved out a successful solo career, recently releasing fourth album theyesandeye to widespread critical acclaim. She tells us about her guitar playing background

I don't really see myself as a 'guitarist' in the classic sense. I have a pretty unconventional technique – very rustic and self-taught. Funnily enough though I often find 'real' guitarists are quite mystified by my guitar parts and find them difficult to play. It's not that they're particularly complicated but they don't seem to make sense to more technical players.

My first acoustic was a kids' nylon-strung half-size guitar, which I used to take to bed with me at night. I didn't really learn to play at that stage though. I lacked the application. It was much later that I began to play with any seriousness and that was, I'm sorry to say, only around 2002 when I began working on solo material. My first proper guitar was a Fylde Ariel with a rosewood top. A lovely little guitar which I still have today.

I've been playing Martin Guitars (an OM21 and OM28V) for about 10 years. My stepfather used to have an acoustic guitar shop on the outskirts of Manchester and dealt in Martins among others. Initially I was drawn to English-made parlour guitars, but I've become pretty hooked on my OM series Martins. Both the ones I play originally belonged to my stepdad and, because he had a bit of a habit of wanting to change guitar every year or so, I'd buy his old ones. That arrangement served me pretty well.

The 28V is my favourite guitar. I can't really explain why I prefer it to the OM21. It just has a special tone and I'm especially attached to it. The neck on it actually got broken by roadies at a charity gig I once did and I was heartbroken. Thankfully I found a brilliant luthier who saved its life.

I think playing acoustic guitar is more about feel than anything else. If you think about the craftsmanship that goes into making a good acoustic then it's all about making that instrument sing in its truest voice. In that sense I think it's very different to playing an electric.

Alternate tunings allow for more experimentation; each tuning having a distinctive flavour, thus helping the writing process. I love trying new tunings and just noodling around until I get onto something that might become a song. I guess DADGAD's a predictable "go-to" but I write quite a bit in open G too.

Top of the list of my guitar heroes would be Nick Drake for his idiosyncratic style. I gather he had real trouble playing live because he used so many tunings he'd have to re-tune between almost every song and his audiences weren't altogether patient. I hate to think of the sensitive soul that he was being heckled and losing heart. Other heroes would have to be John Martyn, John Renbourn and Elliott Smith.

I can't possibly say who the best acoustic player who ever lived was; there are far too many contenders to the throne. Although, having said that, I think Django Reinhardt would take some beating. ■

***theyesandeye* is out now on Nude Records. Lou is playing four headline dates from 20-30 October. More details at: www.lourhodes.com**

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LONDON ACOUSTIC

The London Acoustic Show 2016 came. It saw. And it conquered

The London Acoustic Show at Olympia London in leafy Kensington is perfectly placed in the calendar – just after the holidays, so everyone feels refreshed after a break away from the guitar, and in sight of Christmas, so a great time to check out the latest models and have an informal chat with luthiers and dealers who are all spread out in the roomy exhibition space.

Once again, dozens of the top luthiers and manufacturers of acoustic guitars from the UK and beyond assemble across the room, alongside any and all the peripheral kit to go along with them that you can think of. It's all here for visitors to look at and, with permission of course, try out. Because the event takes place over two separate days, there is ample chance to sleep on that thought about upgrading your guitar, or maybe simply buying the instrument of your dreams. It's also a time when dealers offer discounts on their instruments, so it's always a good time to come and discuss a deal.

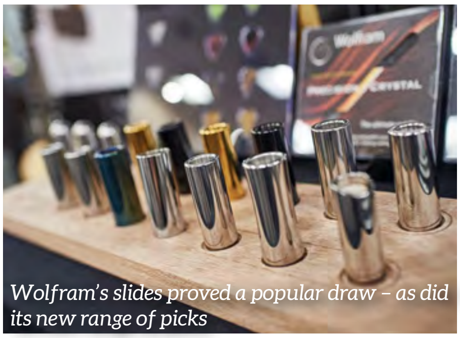
We must also express appreciation and admiration for the musicians who populate the Acoustic Café over the weekend. As the name suggests, it's a special performance spot just across from the food and beverage service area, where invited players can entertain the audience throughout both days. As a showcase for upcoming players, it is an enviable place to play and sing for people who understand and appreciate their craft, and, as in previous years, the standard was wonderfully high.

And of course, for many, this is the chance to see top-of-the-range solo players and bands perform in the intimate and up-close surroundings of the auditorium. The atmosphere is pleasantly informal, and musicians and audience members can chat as though they are meeting after a gig for a conversation about acoustic guitars.

First up on Saturday morning was Clive Carroll. Carroll has the easy charm and conversational skill needed to get the best out of this setting, and as always, he set the bar high for the rest of the weekend.

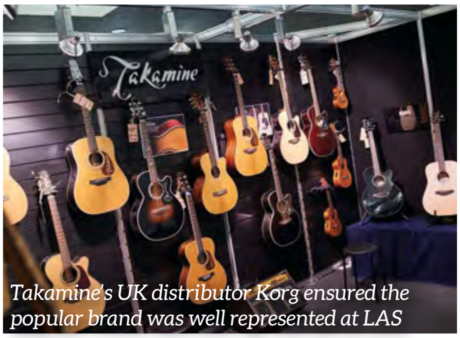
One of the great pleasures of this event is the chance to experience just how vast the variety of tones, sounds, music, and musicians that are linked by the acoustic guitar truly is. Clive Carroll had a good go at illustrating those differences on his own; such was the range of tones and sounds he coaxed from his instrument during his performance. The sheer majesty of his playing must have acted as a spur for the musicians in the audience, seeing and hearing just what can be achieved on this most versatile of instruments.

Next up was Turin Brakes, representing the extreme value for money of the weekend in one performance. Normally, to see a Turin Brakes performance would cost more than attending


Wolfram's slides proved a popular draw – as did its new range of picks

Billy Watman, fresh from his appearance on Sky Arts' Guitar Star looked enamoured with this Ortega classical guitar as he entertained showgoers

Auden's wall of guitars saw plenty of punters stop to take one down and try it out



Takamine's UK distributor Korg ensured the popular brand was well represented at LAS

Promenade Music's stand had guitars and accessories to suit all budgets and abilities

Yamaha's Transacoustic guitars, featuring real-time reverb and chorus effects, were on display

SHOW 2016

WORDS: ANDY HUGHES **IMAGES:** OLLY CURTIS & RICHARD ECCLESTONE

the entire weekend of LAS. Gale Paridjanian, Olly Knights and the gang took to the stage and effortlessly proved how they earned their reputation as peerless musicians and performers. In some ways, it felt like the power of their performance was too big for the room, but that simply made it all the more enjoyable. It's possible that bassist Eddie Myer popped back to the Auden stand to discuss a deal on the acoustic bass that they loaned him for the show; such was the wonderful sound he got from it. 'Future Boy' had some glorious slide guitar from Gale, and 'Summer Rain' was underpinned with muscular dual acoustics – a great performance, much appreciated by the large crowd.

With the ever-present need by some of the media to pin a label and a category on anything that comes their way, Zak Ford's music has been dubbed as 'soul infused melodic folk', which may or may not help his development – we shall see. Back in the real world, the Acoustic Show audience witnessed a musician whose passionate voice and driving chord progressions provided an exciting chance to see a developing talent that is hopefully going to receive appropriate recognition in the coming months. The immediate impression of Ford is that he is a 'non-fragile' Nick Drake, combining a robust delivery both acoustic and vocal, of sensitive songs written with intricate and always intriguing structures. The phrase 'one to watch' is another cliché, but in the case of Zak Ford, it is definitely appropriate. This performance will ensure that the word about his talent will spread, and the path onwards and upwards should be easier for it.

Last up for Saturday was the Chris Woods Groove Orchestra. The set commenced with Chris performing solo, and demonstrating the further reaches of the acoustic guitar sound with a combination of aural treatments and effects and a seemingly unlimited sense of exploration and imagination. Then the other musicians came on, including percussion, bass and tabla, and the entire performance shifted into another gear. It did occasionally re-visit the realms of acoustic guitar as is it popularly recognised, but it didn't stay there for long, and the entire event captured exactly what the Acoustic Show is all about – not just looking at some wonderful new guitars, but also seeing some amazing musicians and generally absorbing the love for the acoustic sound that underlines the whole weekend. Chris Woods' Guitar Revolution, which had been trailed in this magazine in the build up to the event, then saw dozens of guitarists on stage, with Chris conducting an orchestra of 'beautiful strangers' as he memorably put it. We'll let the man himself explain on page 56.

Another vital part of the Acoustic Show is the masterclass suite. This is an enviable opportunity for visitors to attend seminars given by some of the finest acoustic players and teachers in the world, and it's all included in the overall admission price, giving even greater value to the weekend. A number of invited musicians offered masterclasses over the weekend, but of special note were two musicians at either end of the experience scale.

Lowden's stand was full of intriguing delights, including the new Jon Gomm signature model

We doubt this visitor took much persuading to consider buying this Collings guitar

Yamaha's Silent Guitars afforded visitors the opportunity to sit down and plug in

Rotosound's string offering was a hit with show visitors

There was plenty of youthful enthusiasm throughout the weekend

Eastman had Evert Zeevalkink demoing his skills on its stand and in the new workshop room

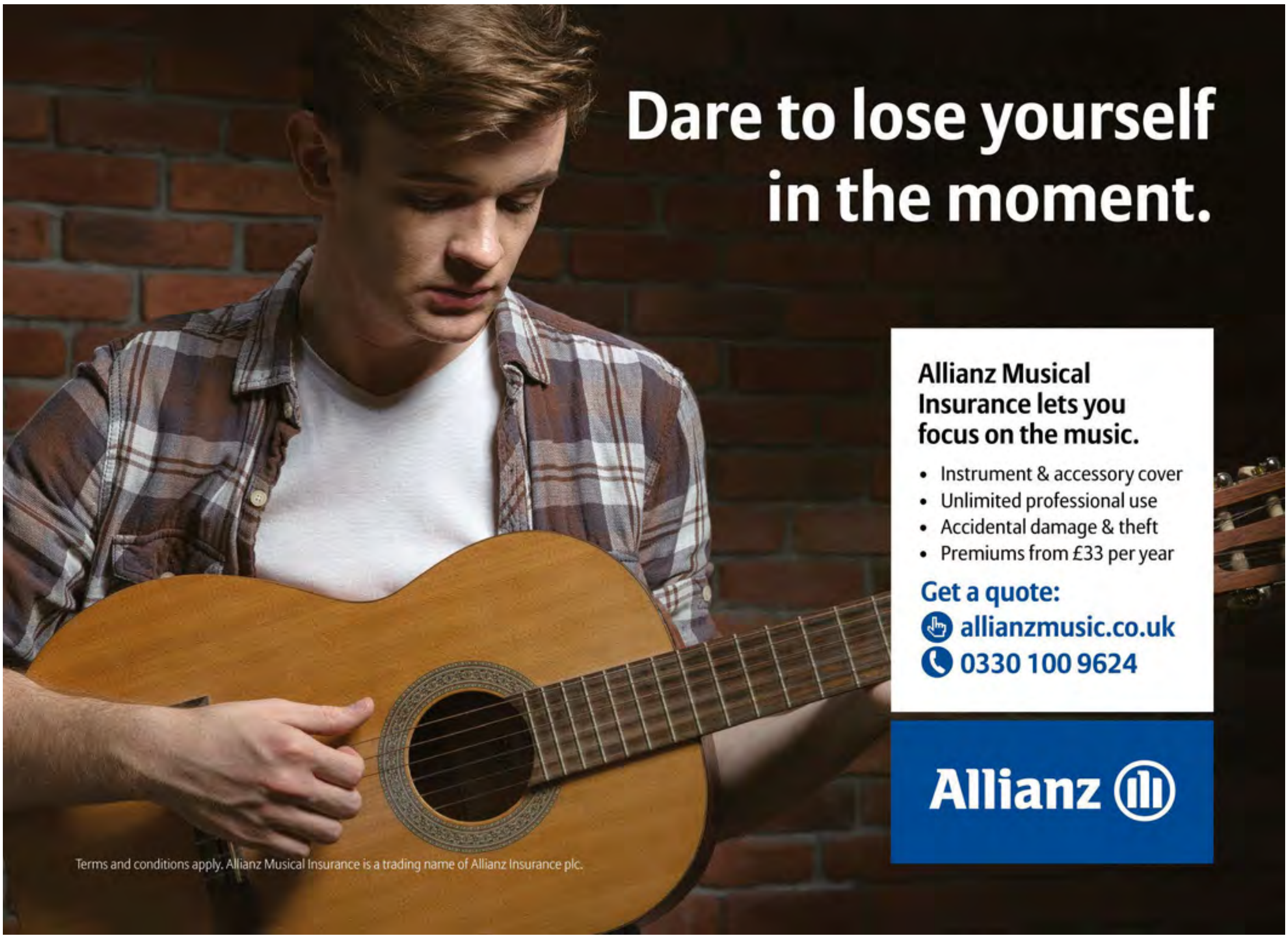
First was the peerless Gordon Giltrap, an acoustic musician who has done as much as anyone to create and sustain a wide interest in the acoustic guitar over getting on for 50 years. Gordon provides a living link with the national tapestry of acoustic music and talked lovingly of his inspirations like Bert Jansch and John Renbourn, idols to us, friends and collaborators to him. Thankfully returning to health after recent surgery and a performance layoff, it was wonderful to see and hear Gordon talking and playing again, and his masterclass was full of admiring aficionados keen to pick up some wisdom from one of the masters of the craft. And of course, Gordon did not disappoint: his easy conversation, ready wit and depthless knowledge were all brought into the room, and everyone who attended will have learned much about the instrument we all love.

At the other end of the timescale was Blair Dunlop, who appeared as an Acoustic Café performer at the show just a few years ago, and has now progressed to become an award-winning and respected singer-songwriter. These workshops are where the genuine personality of the presenter shines through. It is impossible to appear pleasant, knowledgeable, humble, enthusiastic, and genuinely pleased to be on stage if you are not – the audience sees through it in a moment. It is clear that Blair Dunlop, however, was all those things. Having gently refused to trade on the name and reputation of his father (Fairport Convention's Ashley Hutchings), Blair has carved out his own name, reputation, and musical style – and was delighted to discuss his art with wit. Such enthusiasm will only raise his already excellent profile and draw more people to his own music.

The workshops continue to represent a valuable addition to the Acoustic Show, and enable visitors to connect with a group of musicians who can answer questions and demonstrate techniques in a friendly and informal atmosphere.

On Sunday morning the weather was kind again, and the atmosphere was buzzing from early on as the visitors strolled around the stands and looked and listened as guitars, effects and accessories were demonstrated and discussed in the enjoyably intimate and friendly surroundings.

First onto the stage on Sunday was Richard Gilewitz, a real find for anyone not familiar with either his amazing guitar playing or his extraordinary brand of wit and story-telling. Gilewitz brings to mind Arlo Guthrie, not for his playing – Gilewitz is a far superior technician – but for the verbal interplay with the audience. He has a masterful way of delivering self-deprecating anecdotes that could easily stand alone as entertainment, but they act merely as a framework for some of the most dexterous acoustic playing of the whole weekend. A spontaneous example of Richard Gilewitz's wonderful wit was his sight of our photographer sizing up a shot, and Richard adjusting his non-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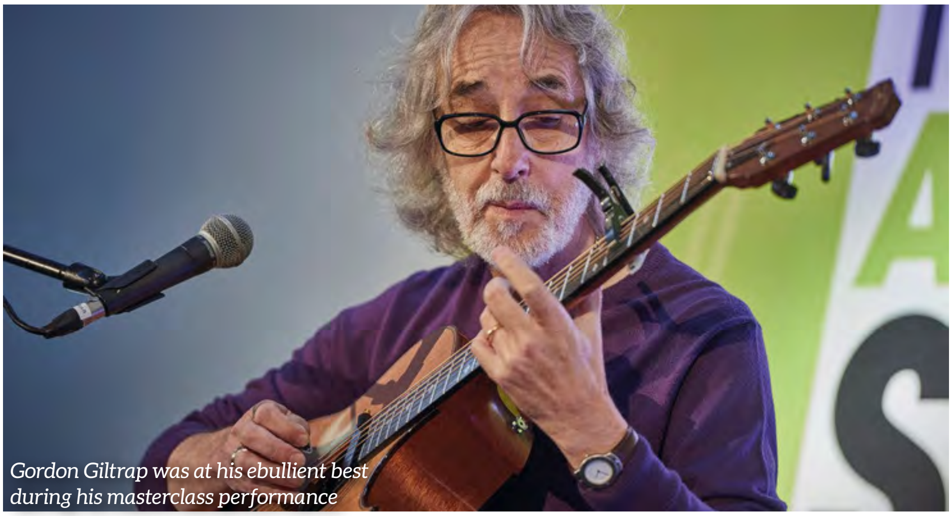
The Turin Brakes drew a huge crowd on Saturday

Preston Reed was the final act on the main stage and ensured that the show closed with a percussive bang



Gordon Giltrap was at his ebullient best during his masterclass performance

Blair Dunlop's masterclass was a huge success as he delved into his technique and influences

existent hair with a dazzling smile, while not missing a single beat of the guitar figure he was playing at the time. Once again, a musician to watch out for when comes over on tour – a full evening of this level of playing and conversation should not be missed.

Richard also turned his talents to the ukulele in the new for 2016 workshop room, which sat alongside the exhibitor hall. In here he delivered an impassioned speech and performance about the simple joy of playing the ukulele, which he later told me inspired at least one of his audience to buy a uke on the day.

The workshop room also provided free screenings of Martin's new documentary, *Ballad of the Dreadnought*, which commemorated the 100th anniversary of the famed Martin Dreadnought and ran throughout the weekend. A real highlight in this room was provided by Eastman, who had loopmaster and guitarist extraordinaire Evert Zeevalkink demoing its range of guitars to the gathered crowd twice a day. Evert's efforts drew plenty of new fans, with some immediately turning to Facebook to rave about his performance – and the Eastman guitars he was playing.

Back to the main stage, and one of the finest fingerstyle guitarists playing today. Stuart Ryan once again underlined the vast difference in sounds and playing styles of the musicians who performed this weekend, with his own individuality brought to the performance stage in the middle of Sunday morning. Stuart's chats between his guitar pieces kept the audience entertained and educated in equal measure.

The final performance of the afternoon was from Preston Reed. Preston is too modest to claim for his own the technique of percussive beats on the guitar body and strings, but he is without doubt one of its main practitioners, and he has done much to present this unique and exciting acoustic technique. But to automatically associate Preston Reed only with the percussive aspects of his playing style is to do him a disservice – ignoring his masterful acoustic technique which is demonstrated on songs like 'Love In The Old Country'. It was an entirely dazzling performance, and a fitting finale for a fabulous weekend of all things acoustic.

The year-on-year increase in the world's interest in and enjoyment of acoustic music goes on, and the increasing success of the enduring London Acoustic Show proves it. Plans will be being made, artists will be being invited, dealers will be putting down their names, and most importantly, nearby accommodation will be being booked. So as soon as the London Acoustic Show 2017 is announced, that's the time to start making plans to come down and join us. It's like Glastonbury; you know it will be wonderful even before you know who is going to appear. You are guaranteed a weekend of the sights and sounds of beautiful guitars and accessories, some marvellous educating and stimulating workshops and some fabulous on-stage live performances from the acoustic world. ■

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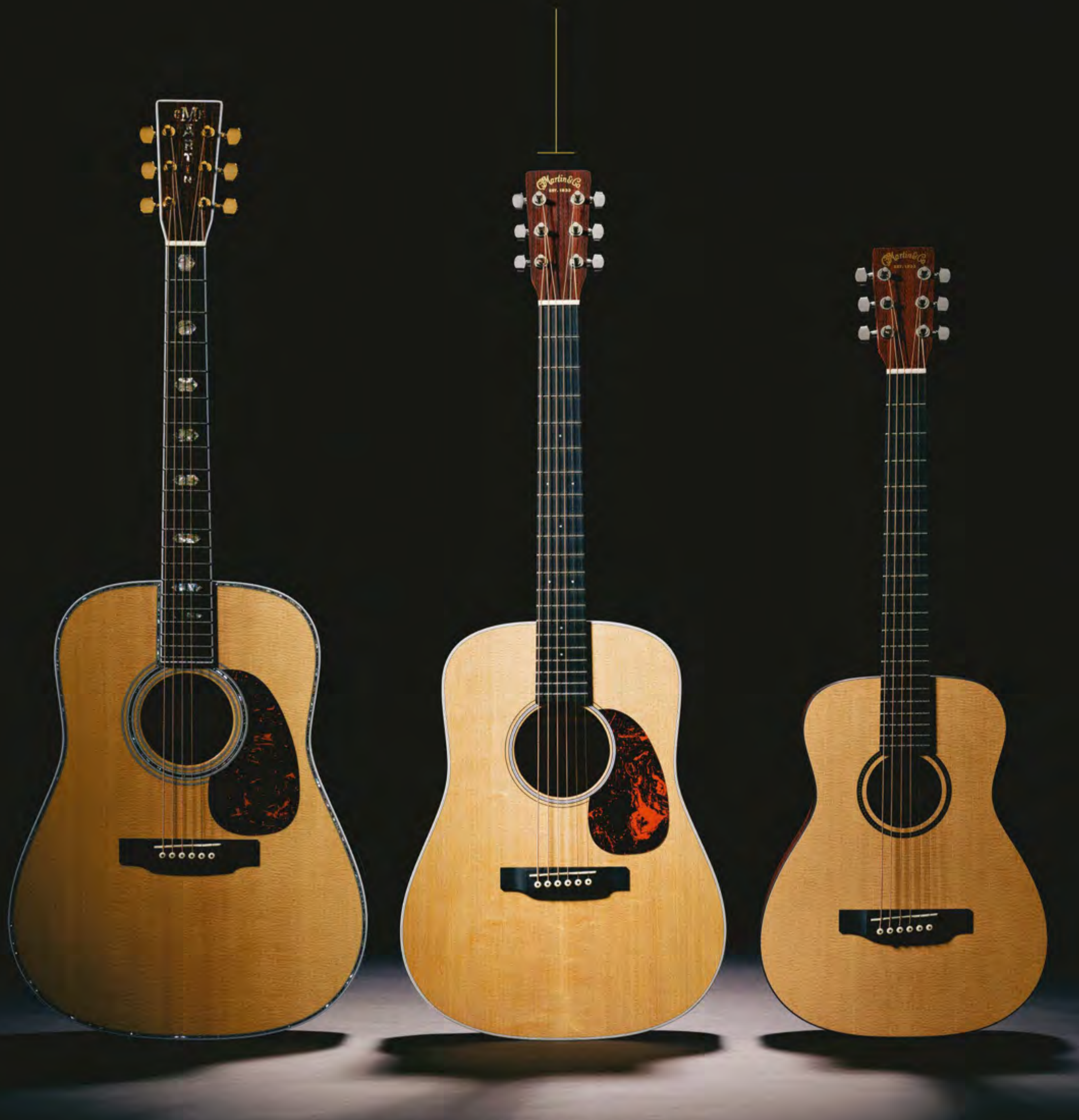

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GUITAR REVOLUTION

Chris Woods, the architect behind Guitar Revolution, talks us through the largest act of the weekend

To say I was nervous on Saturday morning is an understatement. The idea of creating a mass guitar orchestra was something I had been toying with for well over a year. The piece itself went through a lot of changes over many months, trying to hone it to be as accessible as possible. In short, a lot of work had gone in and its success now solely relied on the general public. In the weeks leading up to this, people were engaging massively on social media, but my question remained: would this manifest into something real?

My faith in humanity often wavers. I think it's the news that does it, or perhaps social media itself. All those stories of apathy and horror. However, on Saturday 10 September at 1pm my faith was restored.

As I stood outside our rehearsal room eagerly waiting, I was greeted by a sea of strangers and friends bearing guitars and smiles. There were so many of them in fact, that we couldn't fit them all in the room!

Our first run through commenced; and everyone played it beautifully. The applause and cheers that followed said so much. We did it! We got together as a group of musicians, of all ages, all abilities and all styles, and played a piece of music together perfectly – except, really we did more than that. The rehearsal room was quite literally brimming with genuine joy. There was a sense that a call to arms had been answered, and every single player bravely played their part and won a vibrant victory.

Two rehearsal groups later, it was stage time. There was a hustle and bustle backstage; people of all ages chatting, exchanging ideas and stories. There were some who had never performed on a stage before, standing shoulder-to-shoulder with seasoned pros.

The performance came and went in a flash, the applause was blistering, and the playing was stunning. We didn't just play this piece of music – we brought people together in a way that was truly inclusive and real. Music crosses boundaries of all kinds; it takes us away from all that bad stuff and quite literally brings people together in a world beyond media. I believe those who played and supported 'Guitar Revolution' demonstrated what amazing things people power and the humble guitar can achieve. 'Guitar Revolution' is going on tour in 2017 and we hope you can join us. ■

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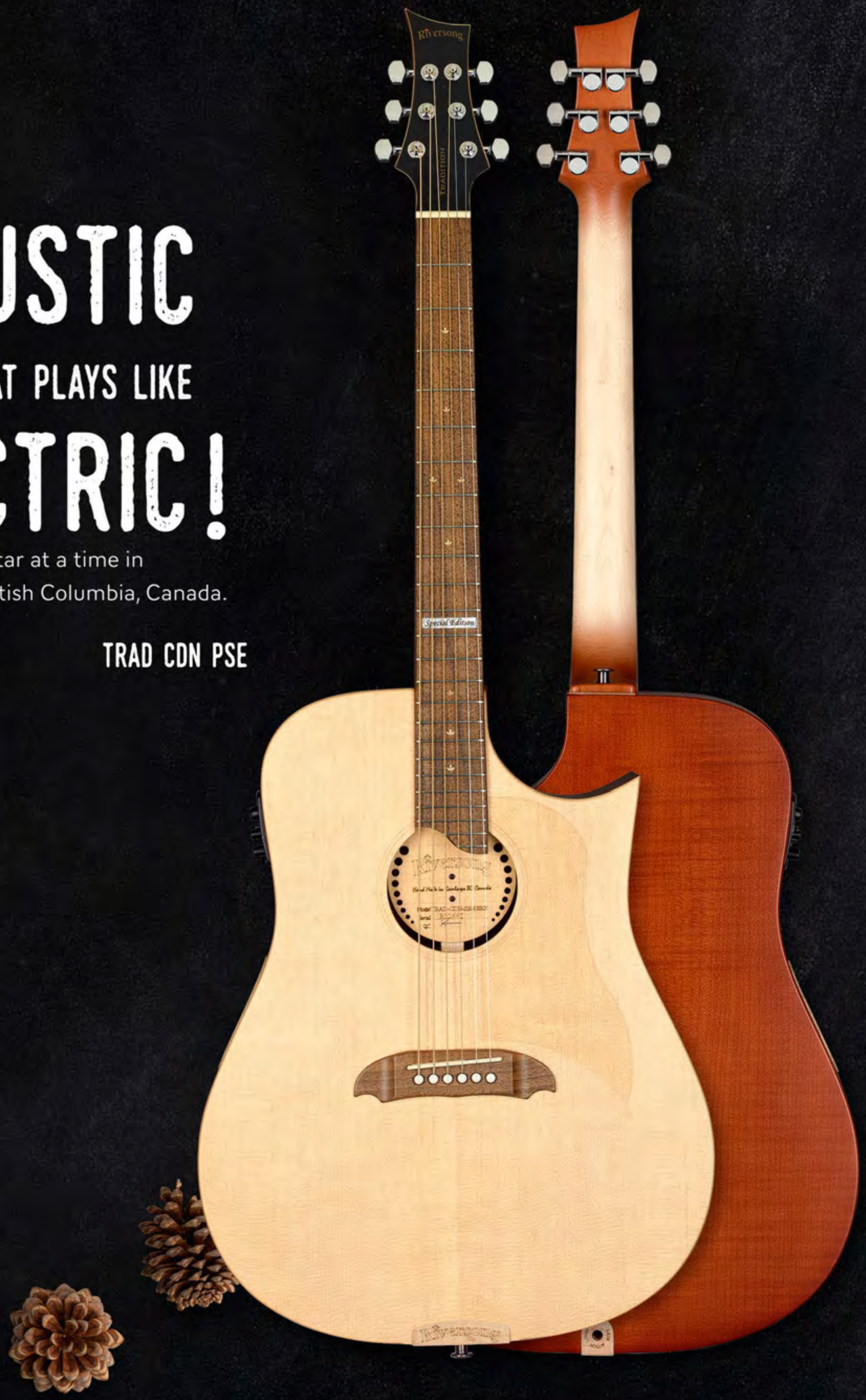

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MARTIN 00017E BLACK SMOKE

If a common-or-garden Martin isn't quite good enough, why not go for a limited edition? Joel McIver feels the width of this black beauty…

WORDS: JOEL MCIVER

Two grand – less the price of a London pint – is a lot to pay for a guitar by anyone's standards, even though we regularly review instruments of two or three times that price here at *Acoustic* HQ. More relevantly, there is a whole class of competing acoustics around that price point from all the big luthiers and many of the boutique companies.

No doubt it is global material and labour costs, plus various sales taxes, which dictate the magic RRP of about £2000, rather than a giant conspiracy in which all the manufacturers get together and agree on that pricetag – but however that number is arrived at, that stratum of the market is saturated with guitars. How's a guitarist to navigate the £2k acoustic jungle?

Heritage counts for a lot, of course, and Martin have that in abundance. Which of the greatest guitarists hasn't played a Martin? Dylan, Lennon, Clapton… those names mean a lot to an affluent generation of guitar players of a certain age, and those people are the exact demographic who will be shelling out the value of a 1998 BMW for this instrument.

The words 'limited edition' count for a lot, and while we've been unable to ascertain exactly how many Martin 00017Es will be made in this super-tasty black smoke finish, it won't be many, relatively speaking. So that's another major plus-point in this guitar's favour.

Fortunately, it has many more such points. That outlaw finish will make many of us think of the great Johnny Cash, even though he was more usually associated with guitar brands beginning with G. A sitka spruce top and mahogany sides and back are underneath that doomy satin finish, providing the useful all-round combination of bass and zing when strummed. The 000 body size – bigger than an 00 or an 0, trivia fans, but smaller than a Dreadnought or Grand Performance – sits in that happy medium zone between subtlety and stridulence, too. When it comes to getting the best qualities of the Martin brand and distilling them into a single body shape, the 000 has justifiably become hugely popular.

"Glass-shattering highs aren't what this guitar is about – high and low mids dominate the tone range, complemented by plenty of bass when it's required"

The tuners are interesting (only in a guitar mag would you read that line, eh?). With their housings made from what appears to be a gothic, gun-metal material, they turn stiffly rather than easily and do their job with authority. Tune down to D or even C, and the instrument responds with alacrity and an admirable evenness of volume across the strings. The nut is bone, as you'd expect at this price, and the bridge a thing of elegant beauty.

Pick the Martin up and strum, unplugged: your first impression will be one of restrained power. Truly glass-shattering highs aren't really what this guitar is about: instead, high and low mids dominate the tone range, complemented by plenty of bass when it's required. Pick close to the bridge, though, and the majority of anyone's treble response requirements will be met.

The neck is one of the Martin's major assets. According to the luthier blurb, what we have here is a "modified low oval neck with a Performing Artist taper", which goes some way to describing the feel of this splendidly engineered chunk of hardwood. Slick but solid, the rosewood fingerboard is a joy to navigate, with access restricted to the first 14 frets of 20 as per usual. Our review model arrived in perfect standard E tuning and we spent a good few hours running it through its paces before even thinking about plugging in.

Once hooked up to your amp, the Matrix VT Enhance electronics made by Fishman do their job simply and efficiently. Looking for controls on the top of the guitar? Look elsewhere, namely just inside the soundhole, where rotary volume and tone wheels await you on top of the pickup unit. Debate tends to rage about the pros and cons of these systems: personally, I prefer not to have to root around near the strings, and a topside control panel seems the obvious solution, but these things are subjective.

However, the performance of the Fishman pickup is not in doubt: there's tons of

"Tune down to D and the instrument responds with alacrity and an admirable evenness of volume"

headroom in the volume, and the tone control certainly adds top and bottom end to the range, even though most of the basic tone of the 00017E is available unplugged. Roll off the tone a touch for a warm, breezy sound that complements powerful strumming: dial it up for gentler fingerpicking too, but this is a guitar built for chords – solid, robust and loud.

We recently received a Martin GPCX1AE for review, a single-cutaway job that costs around £1,300 less than the 00017E. With its Grand Performance body size, it's quite a chunk of guitar for its price. Look out for a review in a future issue: we only mention it here because compared side by side, the

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> ***"Dial up the tone control for fingerpicking, but this is a guitar built for chords – solid, robust and loud"***

MARTIN
00017E BLACK SMOKE

NEED TO KNOW

Model: 00017E Black Smoke
RRP: £1995
Body Size: 000
Made In: USA
Top: Sitka spruce
Back and Sides: Mahogany
Bridge: Modern straightline, rosewood
Neck: Select hardwood
Fingerboard: Rosewood, bone nut
Frets: 20
Tuners: Golden Age Relic Nickel
Nut Width: 1.75"
Scale Length: 24.9"
Onboard Electrics: Fishman Matrix VT Enhance NT1
Strings Fitted: Martin SP Lifespan Phosphor Bronze Light
Gig Bag/Case Included: Yes

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

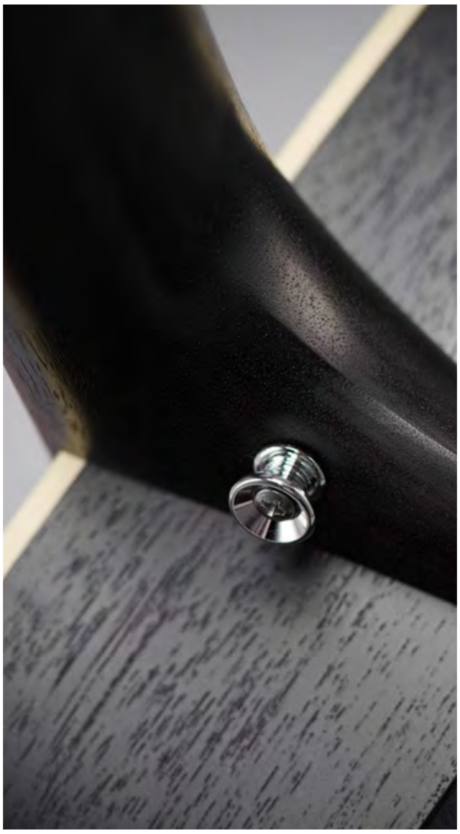
Pros: Heritage values; limited-edition kudos
Cons: Many, many competitors at this price point
Overall: Buy if you absolutely insist on a Martin; if not, check the competition

ACOUSTIC RATING

Build Quality:
Sound Quality:
Overall:

CONTACT DETAILS

www.martinguitar.com



two instruments don't make it immediately obvious why one costs a third of the other.

One answer may be that the pricier guitar has benefited from a dressing process which Martin label as 'Playability Enhanced', a subtle part of the engineering and construction that leads to a smoother experience. Essentially it ensures that the string height and tension is optimal, which obviously sounds lovely on paper but is a little hard to 'feel' under the fingers unless you get to play the same instrument that hasn't been given the extra TLC.

You're also paying here for the limited run of instruments, the pricier tonewoods in the body and neck, and that superb satin finish. If all this adds up to two thousand pounds' worth of value, don't hesitate – this is a wonderful guitar from top to bottom.

Is it the obvious contender at this price level? By no means. There are plenty of excellent acoustics available at this RRP, so please investigate the new and used market before committing. That said, if you do plump for this nifty 000 model, you won't regret it. ■

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Santa Cruz

SANTA CRUZ GUITAR COMPANY FTC 40TH ANNIVERSARY

California luthiers Santa Cruz decided their 40th anniversary was a great time to revisit a classic – and what better choice than this quirky flat-top cutaway made famous by one E Clapton?

WORDS: STEVE BENNETT

It must be handy being based in a town whose name conjures an instant and effortless California cool. Admit it, extolling the charms of your Jumbo Walsall or Custom Cutaway Scunthorpe isn't exactly going to thrill your acoustic acolytes. A limited edition, 40th Anniversary Santa Cruz FTC, on the other hand… now we're talking. Still, what's in a name? The answer, if you've been building a reputation for consistently superb, handmade quality since 1976, is 'a hell of a lot'. You simply won't find a duff Santa Cruz; it wouldn't get out of the workshop. And while we're naming names, Richard Hoover's West Coast headquarters is just that – a custom workshop – not, as he's at pains to point out, a factory. The company supports a staff of around 20 and builds in the region of 500 guitars a year. Consider a 'bespoke', individual luthier's output as being about a dozen instruments over a similar period and Hoover's point becomes abundantly clear.

The first FTC (flat-top cutaway), from 1978, was seen as something of a platypus when it was initially trailed – neither fish nor fowl – and at the time, the embryonic Santa Cruz Guitar Company didn't have the marketing machinery to explain the radical design concept, let alone extoll its virtues. The idea was to develop an instrument that would deliver the trademark projection and note separation of a big-bodied, jazz arch-top (the kind specifically modelled to 'cut through' volume-wise when surrounded by other orchestral instruments) in conjunction with the increased sustain of a traditionally X-braced flat-top. But Hoover's vision of harnessing the best of both worlds failed to ignite the collective acoustic-buying imagination; until, that is, fate did the one thing it's good for and intervened. Around 1980, *Frets* reader Mr E Clapton spotted a tiny

ad in the classified column and duly contacted Hoover with a view to getting his hands on one of these intriguingly unconventional FTCs. He ended up buying one, loved it, featured it on the *Another Ticket* album and, almost overnight, kick-started an upward trajectory that's since seen the company established as possibly the best, big 'small-maker' around.

With those early FTCs having struggled to galvanise the buyers' market, the Santa Cruz luthiers focused their efforts on the more straightforward F and FS flat-backed models they've stuck with, successfully, to this day. It turned out that the development of that now-iconic F body-shape (the just-under 16" lower bout and slender waistline inspired by 1950s Gibson J-185s; slightly bigger than a OOO but smaller than a dread or jumbo) triggered a major design rethink among previously wary 'mass-manufacturers' and helped usher in a whole new era of acoustic innovation. Nonetheless, it was perhaps the reappearance of Clapton's 'original' (in dire need of repair after suffering a prolonged bout of wood-warping sunstroke on a Caribbean runway) that inspired the company to look back to their earlier, boldly inventive, carved, arch-backed hybrid as a fitting commemoration of this, their 40th year in the game.

The FTC arrives promptly on the back of the awesome, one-off 'Ghost Oak' acoustic, so it's got a lot to live up to in the 'follow that!' stakes. This model is #6 of the subtly varying dozen SCGC plans to release this year before, it's mooted, re-establishing the model as part of their regular production output. Straight out of the elegant, slim-line Ameritage custom case – and coming from the angle of your everyday, half-decent, OM-wielding fingerstylist (with occasional dreadnought tendencies) – this guitar looks different, feels different and sounds different.

First off, it's a thing of striking beauty; a smaller, dressed-down version of those mighty, art deco, chord-comping monsters from the age of Ellington and his big band contemporaries. The clearest homage is in the white-bound, wave-roll headstock with its wonderfully precise and smooth-geared Schaller tuners (modelled on the old jazz-era Grover Imperials) and the offset, oyster-shell fan inlays adorning the bound, ebony fretboard. Beyond this determined reaffirmation of the original Clapton-endorsed concept, the decorative appointments are comparatively restrained. There's a discreet, inlaid half-moon 'date panel' above the nut and an elegantly-tooled '40th' etched into the heel-cap, while the unfussy black and white ivoroid bindings and rosette (plus scratch-plate free top) offer an aesthetic balance that suggests this is very much an instrument to be played rather than simply

"This guitar looks different, feels different and sounds different"

admired from a distance. And it does, indeed, sound magnificent. As stated earlier, there's something thrillingly different about the FTC; the defiantly retro-cool look, the comfortably sleek, luxurious feel of both body and neck, but, most significantly, that amazing tone. Hoover himself has described the FTC's projection as "shockingly loud and direct" and – though that carries perhaps too negative a connotation for the average UK language pedant – it's certainly arresting; powerful to the point of 'ears playing tricks' double-takery.

The first impression (apart from that volume) is of a clean, clear articulation whereby strummed, open-voiced chords come leaping out as groups of interlocking, individual notes rather than hitting you like some big, soggy overtone pudding; a perfect tonal illustration of the arched back functioning precisely as intended. Carving said back, especially from maple and in the traditional violin/cello method (as opposed to the more conventional back-building technique of bracing flat, book-matched pieces into a gentle curve) is a huge undertaking in terms of time and resources, but SCGC, with its commitment to impeccable craftsmanship, isn't cutting any corners. By way of tone 'compensation', Hoover's modified the top bracing and interior structure for increased resonance and sustain to produce an instrument with the lightning-fast response to reward the punchy precision of jazz chords and single lines, yet maintain all the warmth needed to serve the more lingering riches of DADGAD balladry. He's also a strong advocate for European spruce, believing its high strength-to-weight ratio gives it an unmatched clarity of projection. The rumbling bass thump of the classic dreadnought has been filtered out here in favour of note separation and balance all the way up the neck, yet such is the 'headroom' when played hard, that precise definition never gets lost. There's a sense the FTC could hold its own in just about any stylistic company.

The review instrument boasts a flamed maple back, sides and dovetail-jointed neck tinted to a rich auburn (only enhancing those flames) and an Italian spruce top, sun-bursting from autumnal russet to glowing amber; an overall finish the old Gibson mandolin makers would have described as 'Cremona'. The company is keen to make it clear, in these rightly eco-conscious times, that all the woods – maple, spruce and the ebony of both fretboard

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SANTA CRUZ GUITAR COMPANY
FTC 40TH ANNIVERSARY

NEED TO KNOW

Manufacturer: Santa Cruz Guitar Company
Model: 40th Anniversary FTC #6
RRP: £10,995
Made In: USA
Body: F Style cutaway
Top: European spruce
Back and Sides: Carved flamed maple
Neck: Flamed maple with '40' on heel cap
Fingerboard: Ebony
Bridge: Ebony
Nut Width: 1 11/16"
Scale Length: 25.375"
Gig Bag/Case Included: Yes

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: It's fabulous and there are only 12 of them!
Cons: None, unless it's that there are, indeed, only 12 of them.
Overall: A genuinely special piece of modern lutherie history

ACOUSTIC RATING

Build Quality: ✪✪✪✪✪
Sound Quality: ✪✪✪✪✪
Overall: ✪✪✪✪✪

CONTACT DETAILS

www.ivormairants.co.uk
www.santacruzguitar.com

and SC-pattern bridge – plus the oyster-shell mother-of-pearl fittings, have been responsibly harvested. That bar of ebony that forms the fretboard, incidentally, is thicker by design; its density bringing an added weight to the neck that further serves in the cause of enhanced projection. With 14 frets to the body (plus extra room to the 15th afforded by the gently rounded, not-quite-Venetian cutaway), an ultra-comfortable neck profile, 25.375" scale and the company's own, project-specific, low-tension strings, the FTC boasts the kind of effortless playability that, paradoxically, encourages an increased focus on the challenge of doing it justice.

With luthiers of the calibre of Jeff Traugott, Marc Maingard and Stephen Strahm all having honed their skills at Santa Cruz, and legendary players like Tony Rice vetting and helping to refine the product, it's clear we could only be in the rarified, high-end stratosphere with any instrument Richard Hoover is prepared to stake his reputation on.

Combining, as it does, those elements of arch-top and flat-top design that inspired his late-70s vision (now newly refined to capture fully that elusive tone), the FTC is about far more than commemoration, it's about the realisation of a 40-year quest to find a unique voice in the acoustic guitar world.

The FTC looks and sounds like nothing else out there and on this evidence, you'd be hard pushed to find anything, regardless of price, that looks and sounds better – or even comes close. ■

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AVALON CARA L1-OAK & L2-YEW

Handmade in Ireland and providing two different playing experiences, Alun Lower tries to pick out a favourite from these two stunning jumbos from Avalon Guitars

WORDS: ALUN LOWER

Handmade guitars can be a surprisingly tough nut to crack when you're a reviewer. For one thing, price becomes a bit more of a flexible factor – you have to take into account the fact that whoever is looking at taking on such an investment is looking first and foremost for that special spark – that wonderful, irreplaceable feeling that this is your guitar, and that nothing else will do. If that's what you're looking for then you're in the right place. Avalon Guitars are a well-established guitar builder based in Ireland that many of you will have heard of before. For those that haven't, even a cursory look at the company's website will go a long way to showing the detail and craftsmanship that goes into its instruments, and the pedigree of the artists that play them (such as James Morrison and Katie Melua, to name just two contemporary examples).

Compared to many of Avalon's other lines, these two new Cara models are relatively traditional and restrained, but make no mistake - every inch of these guitars is crafted with the same nous and magic that graces the more elaborate designs elsewhere in the lineup. With different tonewoods being used on these two guitars we also get a different playing experience with each one. So without any further ado, let's get down to the nitty-gritty.

When you're reviewing guitars built to this standard, the quest to find faults in the construction is likely to take you weeks rather than hours, and such is the case here – both guitars are superbly detailed and as close to perfect as you're ever likely to find.

Starting with the L1-Oak, it's impossible not to be bowled over by the beautiful colouring and finishing of the bog oak back and sides. Bog oak, if you're unaware, is oak that has been preserved for hundreds, sometimes thousands of years while buried deep in peat bogs, waiting to be uncovered. I've only encountered it as a tonewood once before, but it's an experience I've remembered fondly so I'm really excited to be able to spend some time with this remarkable wood once again. For the L1 the bog oak back and sides are joined by a tasteful Australian blackwood binding, with additional rosewood and sycamore layers used for the purfling seen from the front of the guitar.

Last but not least is a beautifully grained western red cedar top, which combines with the other materials to give a decidedly autumnal feel to the overall look of the guitar. The soundhole is neatly lined with a flash of abalone, accompanied by more of the rosewood/sycamore purfling.

> **"The Avalon L1-Oak has a got a rich, room-filling voice that just makes me want to disappear into my own little world and lose an entire afternoon in music"**

The neck is constructed from the ever-familiar combo of mahogany topped with a perfectly piano-black ebony fingerboard, as well as a continuation of the purfling found elsewhere on the guitar. An inlaid mother of pearl 'tree of life' design stretches across the 12th to the 14th frets, with a rosewood veneer decorating the headstock as a classy finishing touch.

By comparison, the L2-Yew features a (you guessed it) yew back and sides partnered with a sitka spruce top and a maple neck, positioning the tonal spectrum far away from its otherwise similar sibling. Most other details are identical – both instruments are a chunky jumbo body shape finished in a flawless nitrocellulose lacquer, measuring 416mm across the lower bout and 303mm at the other end, with a 258mm waist and an overall depth of 124mm. The L2 however also features a cutaway for improved access at the dusty end of the fingerboard. Neck measurements are 44mm at the nut and 56mm at the 14th fret, making for a nice all-round feel that should be accessible and comfortable for just about any style of playing.

Neither of the guitars here feature electronics, but a choice of Fishman, LR Baggs and K&K Sound upgrades are available as optional extras, along with left-handed construction, 12-string configurations, clear pickguards and an extra strap button at the neck.

All in all, I couldn't help but be seriously impressed by these two guitars – both are distinctive from one another and equally appealing in their own rights. Beautifully balanced and flawlessly constructed, the only problem I could see was having to decide which of these guitars to tune-up first...

For continuity's sake, I decided to start things off with the L1-Oak. Leaving aside the plectrum to focus on fingerstyle in the first instance, I was immediately won over by the rich, woody tones on offer. The jumbo bodystyle provides plenty of volume and presence but it never feels overpowering. Where I would sometimes be distracted by the large dimensions of a jumbo, in this instance I didn't even notice, so focused was I on the sheer quality of the L1's voicing. Bog oak, to my ears, shares many qualities with rosewood, having a powerful low end that balances with a crisp and defined treble, providing a balance that is almost piano-like, but sometimes missing the mid-range push of

a mahogany-bodied guitar. This is where the cedar top matches so beautifully, however, with the warmth of the tonewood providing that extra dimension of tone that makes individual notes stand out and chords shimmer with separation and distinction. It's a gorgeous combo and it sounds great whether you're fingerpicking, flatpicking or even messing about with a slide on an open-tuning. It's an extremely versatile combination, which sounds as good on its own as it does accompanied by other musicians.

The L2-Yew by comparison is a lot lighter on its feet, sounding crisp and harmonious, with an almost airy quality to it. If you're playing solo in your front room, then there's a chance that this tone might not appeal so much as the L1, as it's not quite as 'room-filling', per se. The low end is sharply defined but less forceful than the L1's, which means certain frequencies are lacking in a solo performance. However, where this guitar excels in my mind is as part of a larger ensemble – the tonal balance may favour the higher frequencies but the jumbo body style and quality of tonewoods means that there is still plenty of depth to the L2's voice. Partnered with other guitars and musicians, it stands out

AVALON
CARA L1-OAK

NEED TO KNOW

Manufacturer: Avalon
Model: Cara L1-Oak
RRP: £4250 (cutaway: £4390)
Body Size: Jumbo
Made In: Ireland
Top: Western red cedar
Back and Sides: Ancient bog oak
Bridge: Ebony
Neck: Mahogany w/ rosewood and sycamore
Fingerboard: Ebony with MOP Celtic Tree of Life inlay
Frets: 20
Tuners: Gotoh SG381
Nut Width: 44mm
Onboard Electrics: None (option available)
Strings Fitted: D'Addario EXP 16s
Gig Bag/Case Included: Hiscox Pro II GJ case

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

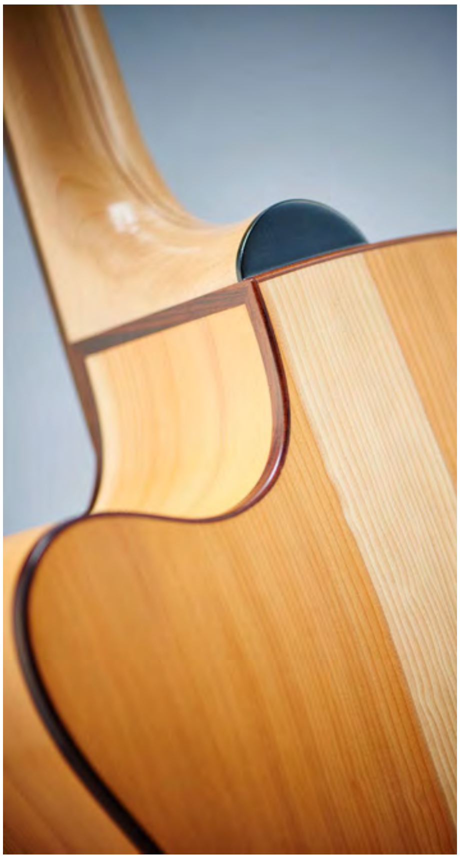
Pros: Masterful construction and a beautifully rich tone to suit players of all styles
Cons: Nothing of note
Overall: A stunning hand-made guitar with a full and detailed voice

ACOUSTIC RATING

Build Quality: ★★★★★
Sound Quality: ★★★★★
Overall: ★★★★★

CONTACT DETAILS

www.avalonguitars.com



that little bit more whether you're playing lead or rhythm – the L2 sits so nicely in the tonal spectrum that everything else simply fits around it, rather than competing with it.

Both the L1-Oak and L2-Yew are wonderful, wonderful guitars, and I love that they're so different from one another. I'll readily admit that my own personal preference for solo play would be the L1 – it's got a rich, room-filling voice that just makes me want to disappear into my own little world and lose an entire afternoon in music. But if I was going to play a gig tomorrow (or was blessed with a better singing voice), I daresay I'd be more tempted by the L2, which shimmers and glides so sweetly and can play along perfectly with just about any composition of music you could imagine.

Both guitars are immaculately and lovingly constructed – the care and attention to detail is top-drawer. Yes, they're expensive – but like I said before – if you're looking at a handmade guitar, then you're looking for that little spark of magic that makes a guitar more than just another guitar. Between these two models – and most likely the rest of the company's instruments – I'd say there's a good chance that Avalon has what you're looking for. ■

AVALON
CARA L2-YEW C

NEED TO KNOW

Manufacturer: Avalon
Model: Cara L2-Yew
RRP: £3950 (without cutaway: £3790)
Body Size: Jumbo cutaway
Made In: Ireland
Top: Sitka spruce
Back and Sides: Yew
Bridge: Ebony
Neck: Maple w/ rosewood and sycamore
Fingerboard: Ebony with MOP Celtic Tree of Life inlay
Frets: 20
Tuners: Gotoh SG381
Nut Width: 44mm
Onboard Electrics: None (option available)
Strings Fitted: D'Addario EXP 16s
Gig Bag/Case Included: Hiscox Pro II GJ case

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: Faultless construction, and a crisp, bright tone that begs to be heard
Cons: Not as much of an all-rounder as the L1
Overall: An exemplary instrument, but a particular voice that won't suit everyone

ACOUSTIC RATING

Build Quality: ★★★★★
Sound Quality: ★★★★☆
Overall: ★★★★☆

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Paul Brett and Vintage have a winning formula with their Viator travel guitars. Hywel Davies gets his walking boots on and goes for a ramble with the latest 12-string addition

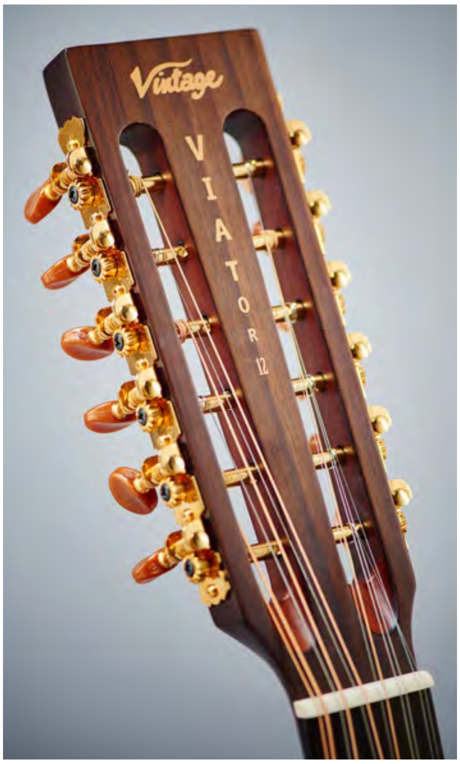
WORDS: HYWEL DAVIES

Paul Brett has made quite the little niche for himself with Vintage in recent years. Though his traditional folk and blues inspired beauties are all worth your time, it's his Viator travel guitar series that really steals the show. Having worked closely with manufacturer John Hornby Skewes, who owns the Vintage name, Brett and all their other endorsees, including acoustic legend Gordon Giltrap, have been building quality instruments since 1965.

Specifically designed by Brett himself – who has been on the folk/rock circuit for over 50 years playing alongside acts such as the Strawbs, Lonnie Donegan, as well as his own project, Paul Brett's Sage – Vintage has produced one charming little instrument that would brighten any player's day. Being a 12-string aficionado since the 70s, Brett is one of the chief authorities on the instrument and is a keen collector of historically significant guitars. With a fondness for early 20th century Robert Johnson-era guitars, Brett has stated in the past that those legendary instruments were a key inspiration in the design of his travel-sized creations. With an impressive range of Vintage signature guitars to his name that include this 12-string, there are also tenor, baritone and regular acoustic guitars that we would love to get our hands on. But for now, the Viator will do us nicely.

Deriving from the Latin for 'traveller', the Viator (pronounced: *vie-ah-tor*) is not meant to stay in one place for any length of time. Measuring in at approximately 900mm from bottom to top, it's certainly one of the smallest on the market, just a few inches smaller than the Taylor GS Mini.

Modelled after its big brother the VE800PB-12, the Viator's brightly toned Sitka spruce top and the seductively dark lacquer over the sapele back and sides looks divine and feels surprisingly solid once securely in your grasp. The smooth matt finish of the Sitka top certainly adds to the refined aesthetic that the Viator resonates from the moment you lay eyes on it. Both bridge and open-headstock are



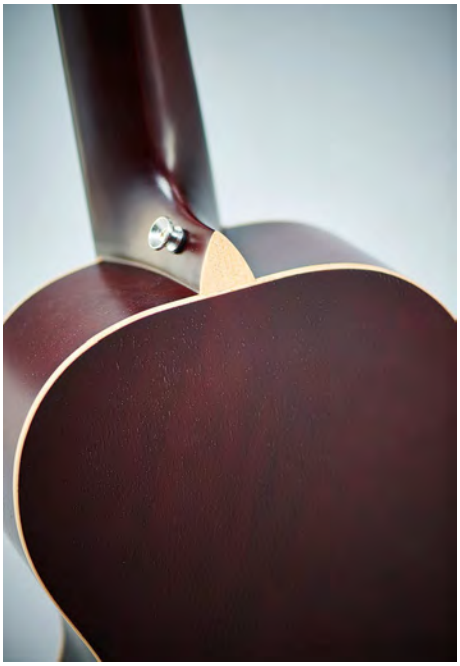
"By some sorcery or optical illusion it never gives the impression that you're playing a smaller guitar"

made of rosewood, which looks and plays the part. However, one of the only complaints we have is that the gold/pearloid button machine heads are a little stiff in places, which can make tuning a bit of a pain, though this will ease up with use.

The customised V-shaped nato neck looks sleek, is smooth to the touch and isn't as thick as it's made out to be. Found throughout the Viator series, those accustomed to a C or a U-neck will notice a slight difference; however, beginners will certainly reap the benefits as they get to grips with learning the guitar. With plenty of room for your palm to rest on, as well as giving your thumb something substantial to brace itself against, the V-neck will help you to nail those first tricky chords. The 365mm, 18-fret rosewood fretboard is pleasant on the finger tips, and by some sorcery or optical illusion it never gives the impression that you're playing a smaller guitar. A good stretch with your first and fourth fingers will land you halfway up the fretboard, giving your hands a proper workout when you most need it.

The 48mm Graphtech NuBone nut has its work cut out. With a 2mm spacing within each pair of unison strings and 5mm between adjacent pairs, it handles the pressure of a regular sized acoustic without the strings getting too close for comfort, allowing plenty of room to work your way around the fretboard. There aren't any dead spots that we could find either, as the action is balanced out just right. Not too low, not too high; the Viator makes sure that all the notes get their chance to shine.

More often than not, acoustics are fitted with only one strap button. Luckily, no such problem here. Though it can't be packed up like the ultra-modern carbon-fibre models, such as the Journey OF660, it can just as easily be flung over your shoulder as you head for the horizon. Just make sure to apply straplocks to avoid any nasty mishaps. If that seems a little too adventurous for your taste, simply having the freedom to switch up your playing position will make all the difference to your daily practice routine.



VINTAGE
VIATOR 12-STRING

NEED TO KNOW

Manufacturer: Vintage
Model: VTR800PB-12
RRP: £349
Body Size: Travel
Made In: China
Top: Solid Sitka spruce
Back and Sides: Sapele
Neck: Nato (custom shaped V)
Fingerboard: Rosewood
Bridge: Rosewood
Nut Width: 48mm
Preamp: Fishman Sonitone and USB output
Controls: Volume and tone
Scale Length: 548mm
Weight: 1.6kg
Strings: Custom USA Made
Gig Bag/Case Included: Vintage 'Viator' Carry Bag

ACOUSTIC TEST RESULTS

Pros: Superb tone, user-friendly, looks that could kill and a modest price tag
Cons: Stiffness in the machine heads and tricky access to the tone and volume controls inside the body
Overall: A low budget instrument that will sweeten your musical journey, no matter where you go

ACOUSTIC RATING

Build Quality:
Sound Quality:
Overall:

CONTACT DETAILS

www.jhs.co.uk

So is it as sweet on the ears as it is on the eyes? You'll be happy to know the sound of this 12-string is deliciously harmonious. Covering the lighter end of the tonal spectrum, it will light up any room by itself, let alone if you were to plug it in. The brightness of its upper register does give your playing that sparkle, although lacks depth in the bass department. It compensates for this by kicking the volume into touch, which will have an upper hand in comparison to other similar guitars in its price range.

Once plugged in, it is a different story. This 12-string will have its voice heard and can easily stand its ground without losing too much of its natural tonality. The 9V Fishman Sonitone preamp really helps to project the guitar's capabilities. However, with the volume and tone controls positioned just inside the Pearloid soundhole, chubby fingered players may encounter difficulties.

One of the major selling points of this instrument is its weight. Coming in at 1.6kg, if you are busking or hiking, it will never slow you down. Given that this latest model comes with a USB port, you can now easily record any ideas that pop into your brain directly into any laptop or compatible recording device, never missing that moment of inspiration. Unfortunately, ours didn't come with a USB cable, however, you should be able to pick one up easily from any high street tech shop for a few quid. An onboard tuner might be asking too much of this guitar – any extra bulk will almost certainly do more harm than good, we suppose.

Taking the playing style of its creator into account, the Viator is better suited for finger players, but does an equally good job for those who favour a pick. This dinky adventure companion is so versatile that dipping into some David Gilmour or Jimmy Page styled blues-rock are welcomed with open arms, happily eating up all those delicious barre chords and pentatonic scale runs. As it's a little restrictive when it comes to string bends, blistering solos of the Edward Van Halen variety are best left at home.

In conclusion, there aren't too many things wrong with the Viator. Given its user-friendly nature, beginners and seasoned players alike will get a kick out of this latest model. It's a steal at £349. Unless you plan on summiting K-2 or chucking a ring into Mount Doom (though we wouldn't put it past it, given its heroic stature), the Viator will keep your fingers in good nick, while being good company on your travels. How much wear and tear this guitar could take on the road will depend entirely on where you plan on taking it. If we had to guess, by the fireplace of your local pub or on a remote lake shore on a summer's day would suit the lifestyle of this little guy perfectly. ■

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MAYA DE VITRY

STYLE… (AMERICANA)

The Stray Birds formed in 2010 and began as a collaboration between myself and Oliver Craven, another fiddle-playing songwriter. The band is based in both Tennessee and Pennsylvania, and though we all dabble on each other's instruments, usually Charlie Muench plays upright bass, Oliver plays guitar, slide guitar, mandolin and fiddle, and I play guitar, banjo and fiddle. Drummer Dominic Billett has recently begun touring with us. We're interested in songs that are lyrically and melodically strong, and we draw influences from the storytelling of country, the political consciousness of folk, the relatability of pop and the sincerity and feeling of blues. We just launched our new album *Magic Fire* at the Philadelphia Folk Festival. It was a 'wow' moment of joy and pride in this band that I created with my friends. Since our last album, *Best Medicine*, we've become better collaborators, better communicators, better singers, better writers and better arrangers. Whenever we recorded another song, our producer Larry Campbell would say, 'This is my new favourite song!' and I feel that way too. Lately I've liked 'Fossil', and it's been fun to finally sing that one in the live show too. Right now, I honestly enjoy the variety of spending a few hours playing someone else's guitar, and learning what I love about it as I get to know it. In the show, Oliver and I share a custom partial sunburst 2013 Huss & Dalton dreadnought made of Honduran mahogany with an Adirondack spruce top. In the studio, we played Charlie's guitar a lot – a 1950s Gibson LG-1 that's been rebraced like the LG-2s of the same era. We play them directly through a pair of Neumann KM 184s to capture a close acoustic sound. At home in Nashville I write on a cracked Martin D-1 and a sweet Epiphone archtop. We're going to bring the new songs to our home region of Pennsylvania with a few shows in December and hope to return to the UK soon.

www.thestraybirds.com

PAUL CRAWFORD

STYLE… (JAZZ/BLUES/SOUL)

I've been the guitarist with Bristol-based jazz, blues and soul band Victoria Klewin and The TrueTones for around five years. Mostly self-taught, I began learning from my dad. Then, in my teens, I had some lessons with our neighbour Jim Armstrong, the guitarist from Them. I joined the band after responding to an ad and we gradually grew through local gigging and networking. Our current lineup is Victoria Klewin (vocals/songwriting), Mark James (bass), Paul Field (harmonica/brass), Sam Mills (piano/keys), Sophie Stockham (saxophone), Tom Bradley (drums) and myself on guitars. Our debut album, *Dance Me To Heaven*, is out shortly. Musically the album's very eclectic, but lyrically I guess it's all about love and relationships. We're all really pleased with it, as we've developed a great live act and trying to capture this in a studio environment was tricky. My electric guitar is an Electra 335, Elvin Bishop model, dating from around 1977. My acoustic is a Lowden 012 with a Fishman pickup under the bridge. I won it in 2001 in a competition hosted by Lowden where guitarists had to play a 10-minute slot in front of a small audience and judging panel. I was shocked to win, but it gained me a previously unattainable guitar and a short slot at the Ards Guitar Festival. It's a versatile guitar. It can really ring if you want to play hard and works great on lighter picking tunes. Standard or altered tunings, it holds a long sustain and delivers a lot of sound for the size of the instrument. I try and keep things simple – with the Lowden I go straight to PA. With the Electra I let the guitar and amp tone dictate. I then use an Ibanez TS808 Tube Screamer, vibe, tremolo and a Dunlop Cry Baby 535Q wah through a small Laney VC30 amp. Future plans? We're currently writing new material and promoting the album in the UK, with a launch night in Bristol towards the end of the year.

www.vk-tt.com

© Kari Bedford

BEN BEDFORD

STYLE… (AMERICANA)

I'm a songwriter and touring artist, based in Springfield, Illinois. My musical influences mainly come from Americana, folk, rock and jazz, but I also really love Baroque classical music, and my new album, *The Pilot And The Flying Machine*, has a definite chamber music influence upon it. I absolutely loved making the album with my friends Diederik van Wassenaer on violin/viola, Ethan Jodziewicz on double bass and my wife Kari Bedford on harmony vocals. Dave Sinko's engineering and mixing was absolutely essential to the sound of the album, and Eric Conn did an amazing job mastering. It's my fourth album, so I do hope to be progressing in some sense. Flight/journey is the central underlying theme. The title track is actually two songs – they seemed so related to each other that I felt they warranted the same title. 'The Pilot And The Flying Machine: Part 2' is one of my favourite tracks, along with 'Letters From The Earth' and 'Long Blue Hills'. I write exclusively on the acoustic guitar. My main guitar is a 2009 Martin D-28 Marquis Madagascar. I love its beautiful tone – warm, but with some good punch. And it's relatively balanced across the strings for a dreadnought. I also have a 2001 Martin J-40, a beautiful-sounding instrument that I use for drop tunings. I usually tune my guitar down a half step, and use drop C and drop D occasionally. At most concerts I mic the guitar with an Audio-Technica 4033 large diaphragm condenser microphone. I prefer the mic sound to the pickup sound. Most of my songs are finger picked. I wear a plastic Dunlop Herco (extra heavy) thumbpick and the nails on my first two fingers are slightly longer than on my other fingers. I use a three-finger style with my pinky finger anchored on the top of the guitar. Future plans? We're currently touring the new album and will be in the UK in April 2017 – details will be on my website.

www.benbedford.com

© Anne Campbell

JENNY STURGEON

STYLE… (FOLK)

As a singer and songwriter I explore themes of folklore, history, personal experience and nature. Though I've been featured on various albums before, *From The Skein* is my solo debut. The title has bird and textile connotations. Skeins of geese trailing across the sky remind me of my Aberdeenshire home. I'm also a spinner and knitter, and a skein is a loose coil of yarn. I like taking something raw – wool or a story – and turning it into a finished product. Creating an album has been a wonderful opportunity for me to bring together what I've learned from touring and recording with other musicians over the years. It's also allowed me to focus on my songwriting and arrangement. One of my favourite tracks is 'Raven'. The combination of Davy Cattanach on percussion and Grant Anderson on double bass produces a gritty sound with raw energy and attitude. I do a lot of research before writing – it's easier to write a song with knowledge of the topic. I mainly compose on the guitar and shruti box, plus any other instruments I have to hand. Composing songs using different instruments helps create different sounds and feelings as well as informing new melodies. My regular guitar is a Finlayson PSM-50-LTD, OO 12-fret, semi-acoustic parlour guitar in black. I find it more comfortable and convenient than a standard acoustic. I mainly play fingerstyle, although I'd like to learn to use a pick confidently. I've started playing in DADGAD, which I'm enjoying. It's great for writing and singing songs as it gives such a rich sound. I recently performed a 30-minute set live for BBC Radio 3's 'World On 3', which was an amazing experience – something I would never have imagined doing a couple of years ago. I'm currently writing some new music to mark the 30th anniversary of St Kilda becoming a World Heritage Site. After that I've got a mixture of gigs and workshops coming up – details on my website.

www.jennysturgeonmusic.com

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MODDI

UNSONGS

WWW.MODDI.NO

One of the most unusual collections of music to surface in a while, Norwegian singer Moddi has picked on the idea of recording 12 songs that have, at some time, either been banned, censored or silenced. It's an intriguing idea, and so Kate Bush's drowsy, moody, epic 'Army Dreamers' – not an obvious candidate – stands alongside Billie Holiday's chilling 'Strange Fruit', and anthemic pieces by Chilean folk legend Víctor Jara and Algerian rebel singer Lounès Matoub. Of course it's pretty strong stuff, and by no means easy listening, but then music shouldn't always have to be. In an age when the voice of protest is needed more than ever, Moddi's is a brave one. **JP**

BROOKE SHARKEY

WANDERING HEART

WWW.BROOKESHARKEY.CO.UK

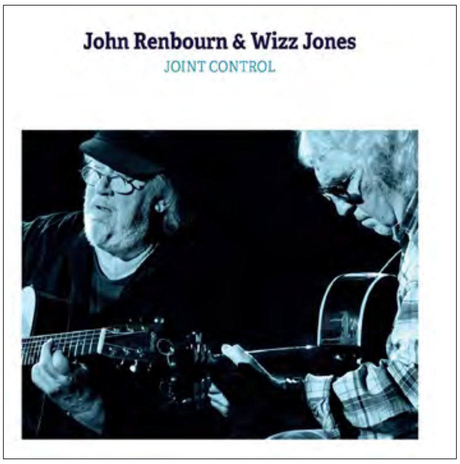
Listening to 'Faces', the third track on this ex-busker's album, it's difficult not to be moved. Quite what she's singing about – the lyrics are partly in French – is a bit of a mystery, but somehow it doesn't matter. Brooke Sharkey's got a lovely way of wrapping herself around a lyric, her voice a sensuous instrument that rises and falls like an incoming tide, before finally slipping away, leaving only wonder. With Adam Beattie's dollops of minimal tremolo guitar, the overall effect is a bit like Francoise Hardy meets Portishead. Jez Houghton's barrelling French horn dropping in over febrile time signatures, as Brooke's crystal vocals float clear. It's all strangely beautiful. **JP**

SARAH JAROSZ

UNDERCURRENT

WWW.SARAHJAROSZ.COM

This album finds the young Texan prodigy relocated to New York and surrounded by new musicians and new influences. But despite ringing the changes, Sarah Jarosz's music is as untrammelled as ever. And as if to prove the point, simple acoustic picking introduces 'Early Morning Light', her lonesome voice ringing out in the silence. By the time we reach the country soul of 'Comin' Undone', there's an electric bass and a wistful Hammond organ in the mix, but at all times the sense of space remains, a blank aural canvas leaving Sarah to shine. A beautifully understated album that gently unfolds mystery – it's her finest hour so far. **JP**



JOHN RENBOURN & WIZZ JONES

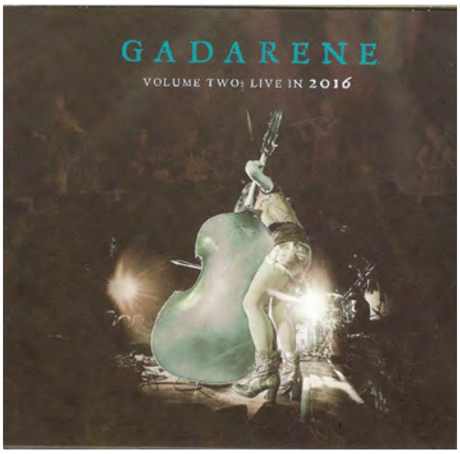
JOINT CONTROL

WWW.WIZZJONES.COM

John and Wizz began working on this album in the months before John's passing in March 2013, and as a document of their time together on the road, it's a gem. All the favourites are here, Big Bill Broonzy's 'Hey Hey', Joseph Spence's 'Great Dreams From Heaven', and a spellbindingly beautiful take on Jackson C Frank's 'Blues Run The Game', long a mainstay of Renbourn's stage set. For those of us fortunate enough to catch these old friends working together, it's not only lump in the throat time, but an indispensable aural memoir. **JP**

MARTHA L HEALY
TO BE FREE
WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/MARTHALHEALY

If you're going to record a country anthem like Patsy Cline's 'Walkin' After Midnight', then you have to do it right, and listening to Martha L Healy you can almost smell the barbecued ribs and feel the warm southern breeze. But remarkably the songs on this EP, which include a couple of Martha's own compositions, were recorded not in Nashville, but on a snowy January day in Glasgow. There's a gentle roadhouse swing to the title track and a Celtic feel creeping in to 'Too Much Time', before the thumping closer 'I Saw The Light' has fiddle and banjo conjuring a taste of gospel worthy of a Mississippi revival meeting. **JP**



GADARENE
LIVE IN 2016
WWW.GADARENEMUSIC.COM

Sometimes it seems the Levellers have a lot to answer for; bands tearing up stages inducing audiences into a frenzy has become a staple of any festival worthy of its mud. Gadarene are a five piece outfit who claim to transform obscure English 18th and 19th century tunes into alternative dance hits. But far from being an excuse for barn wrecking, on the evidence of this live album, Gadarene's clever and intricate arrangements are well above that sort of stuff. Rants and reels there are aplenty of course, but they sound happiest on tracks like the 'Oyster Wife's Rant', where the band meddle with an acoustic trance aesthetic. **JP**

GED WILSON
TONIGHT AT NOON
WWW.GEDWILSON.COM

"I'm not a traditionalist in style," Mancunian bluesman Ged Wilson admits, and with Miles Davis, Gil Scott Heron and Lightnin' Hopkins all figuring in his muse, it's a certainty that there's going to be more to this than rehashed Robert Johnson licks. And from the cool jazz feel of 'The Mighty' to 'Irwell Delta Blues', a graunchy 12-bar solo outing that would surely make Lightnin' smile, Ged continually rings the changes. An abstract piece of slide guitar introduces 'Meet The Boss', 'Evil' is a dead ringer for Peggy Lee's 'Fever', and 'Lady Luck' is a tasteful piece of bluesy R&B. There's nothing earthshaking, but in an often hackneyed musical genre, it's a welcome breath of fresh air. **JP**

THE DANBERRYS
GIVE & RECEIVE
WWW.THEDANBERRYS.COM

It would be easy to dismiss the Danberrys as yet another duo from that vast wellspring of talent that is East Nashville. But it doesn't take much listening to understand why, in 2013, their last album won them a nomination for Best Americana album. Ben DeBerry and Dorothy Daniel come up with some truly great songs, transcending their quicksilver influences – country, pop and country – into a wonderfully fresh-sounding roots stew. Ben gets to throw in a country stomp, Dorothy sings her folky 'Lady Belle', and the pair share vocals on the soulful 'We'll Be Done'. It's all familiar stuff, but you'll never see the join. **JP**

THE BUFFALO SKINNERS
CEASE YOUR DREAMING
WWW.THEBUFFALOSKINNERS.COM

Just as you'd expect of any outfit with four front men, the Buffalo Skinners create a pretty eclectic concoction. Kicking off with a bunch of barn burning romps, echoing rockabilly vocals and James Nicholl's keening fiddle's suitably gritty vibe, the tension drops as the outfit move to Robbie Thompson softly crooning 'Goodbye To My First Love', a mournful ballad with tinges of Bon Iver. Then it's all change as the brooding bluesy guitar introduces 'Monkey On Your Back', a song that gradually descends into a glorious wig out, before it's a return to introspection with 'Sugar Cane'. It may be all over the place, but the fun these guys had cutting this is infectious. **JP**

MARK HARRISON
TURPENTINE
WWW.MARKHARRISONROOTSMUSIC.COM

Listening to Mark Harrison picking out the slide lines on 'So Many Bad People Out There' could almost fool you into thinking the guy's been hanging out on Beale Street in Memphis, Tennessee with Furry Lewis. Breathing fire into the blues is always a tricky business, but Mark's got some great songs laced with folk/blues devilry, and, with a nod to John Fahey, picks some mean 12-string guitar. With a drummer and double bassist who've learned that less is always more, occasional dashes of honking harmonica and accordion, the result is an album that rolls along as smooth as molasses. **JP**

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RODDY HART AND THE LONESOME FIRE

SWITHERING

WWW.RHLF.CO.UK

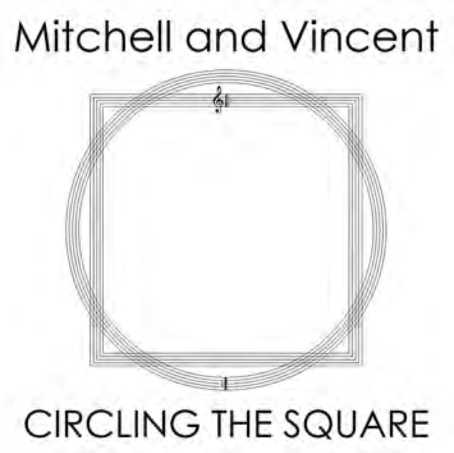
Swithering is a long way from Roddy Hart and his band's more acoustic flavoured work with Kris Kristofferson on *Bookmarks* in 2007. Divided into two 'sides', on the menacing 'No Monsters' vast soundscapes rule, recalling the magnificent gloom of The Cure. Side 'two' becomes marginally more upbeat but by the time you reach the bittersweet 'Strange Addictions', Roddy pleading 'why must you hide away', you do begin to wish things might cheer up a bit. The Kings Of Leon better watch out though. **JP**

ANDY FERRELL

AT HOME AND IN NASHVILLE

WWW.ANDYFERRELLMUSIC.COM

Maybe it's the wheezing harmonica, the cynical realism of the hobo's view of life in 'The Price Of Freedom', or his ballad about Billy the Kid, but this young man from the Blue Ridge mountains of North Carolina has more than a dash of Mr Dylan in his songs. Factor in Woody Guthrie, Hank Williams and Townes Van Zandt, and you'll get a pretty good picture of where Andy's coming from. Nothing new then? Well as they say, it ain't the meat it's the motion, so with half of this album recorded live, and nothing more than acoustic guitar to fall back on, there's nowhere for the man to hide. Great songs played with energy and conviction – Andy Ferrell's way ahead of the pack. **JP**



MITCHELL AND VINCENT

CIRCLING THE SQUARE

WWW.MITCHELLANDVINCENT.COM

Seemingly joined at their musical hips, the second album from this West Country duo finds them again mining the deep well of traditional folk music that is their artistic muse. Songs like the haunting 'High Germany', are paired alongside jigs and reels, workouts that segue into one another at breakneck speed. And at all times, the interplay between David Mitchell's guitar – a classical model he made – and Graham Vincent's fiddle is quite stunning. Sure there're no exultant yahoos, but the thoughtful arrangements interspersed with Graham's quiet, sincere vocals create an album of unusual charm and dignity. **JP**

DAVID CROSBY

LIGHTHOUSE

WWW.DAVIDCROSBY.COM

When David Crosby sings "There's so little time" on the gentle opening track of *Lighthouse*, it's easy to imagine this might be a rumination on his own career. But listening to the 74 year old on this stripped down acoustic album, there's obviously no need to worry. Tracks like the sun-dappled 'Drive Out To The Desert' – the backing not much more than a cascade of acoustic guitar hanging in the ether – supply just the right amount of breathing space for Crosby's delicate vocals. While the glory days of Stills and Nash haunt the tracks, it's a vivid reminder of just what a great vocalist – and guitarist – Crosby is in his own right. **JP**

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Glasgow duo Paul Tasker and Iona Macdonald have often been compared to Sandy Denny and Bert Jansch, and it's easy to understand why; a self confessed Jansch devotee, Tasker's playing has the same flowing feel, his effortless fingerpicking perfectly complementing Macdonald's fragile vocals. An album that doesn't shirk from difficult subject material – politics, alcoholism and prostitution are all vividly brought to life – from the folky 'The Whistle Song', to the light country feel of 'Diesel Engine', and Paul's 'New Year Rag', the pair borrow influences from all over the place. But it all hangs together, making this rather special. **JP**

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Pedal steel has had its fair share of bad press – responsible, as it is, for the noise behind countless guys in cowboy hats singing about being lonesome on lonely street. But this London-based steel wizard kicks any such notions into the stratosphere. On this showing, he's able to tackle just about anything that's thrown at him, from the greasy title track (a jumping slice of uptown NY jazz funk where he comes over like he's been hanging out with the Brecker Brothers) to the breakneck workout 'Cat Doggin' (where he resurrects the soul of Buddy Emmons), this is no place for depressives. Imaginative and superbly played tunes by a master. **JP**

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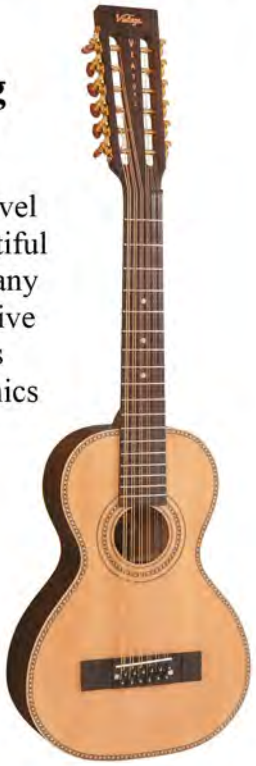

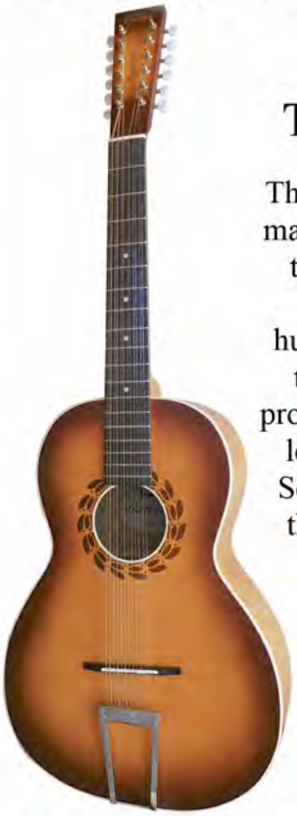

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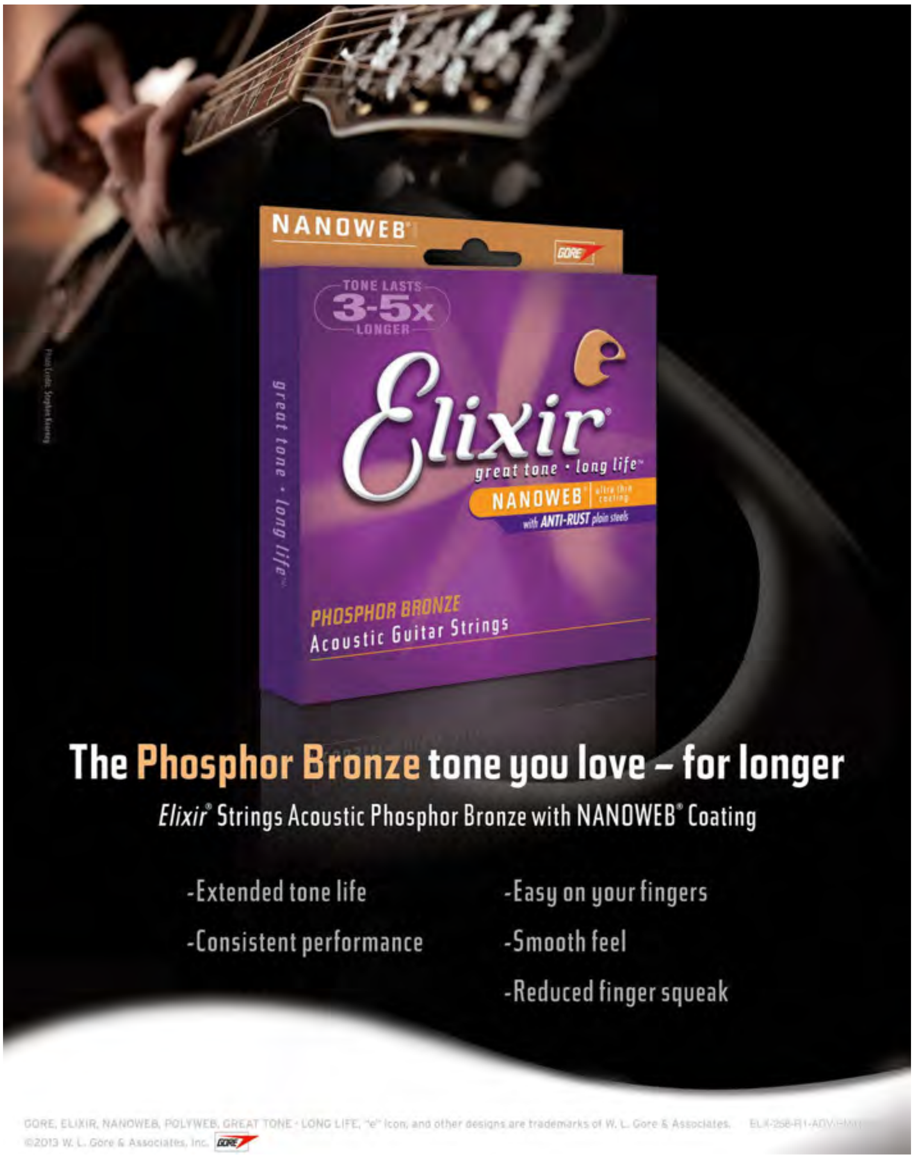

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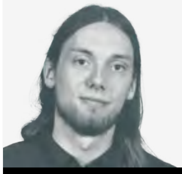
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GORDON GILTRAP INSTRUMENTAL ARTIST

'RAINBOW KITES'

FULL TAB ONLINE

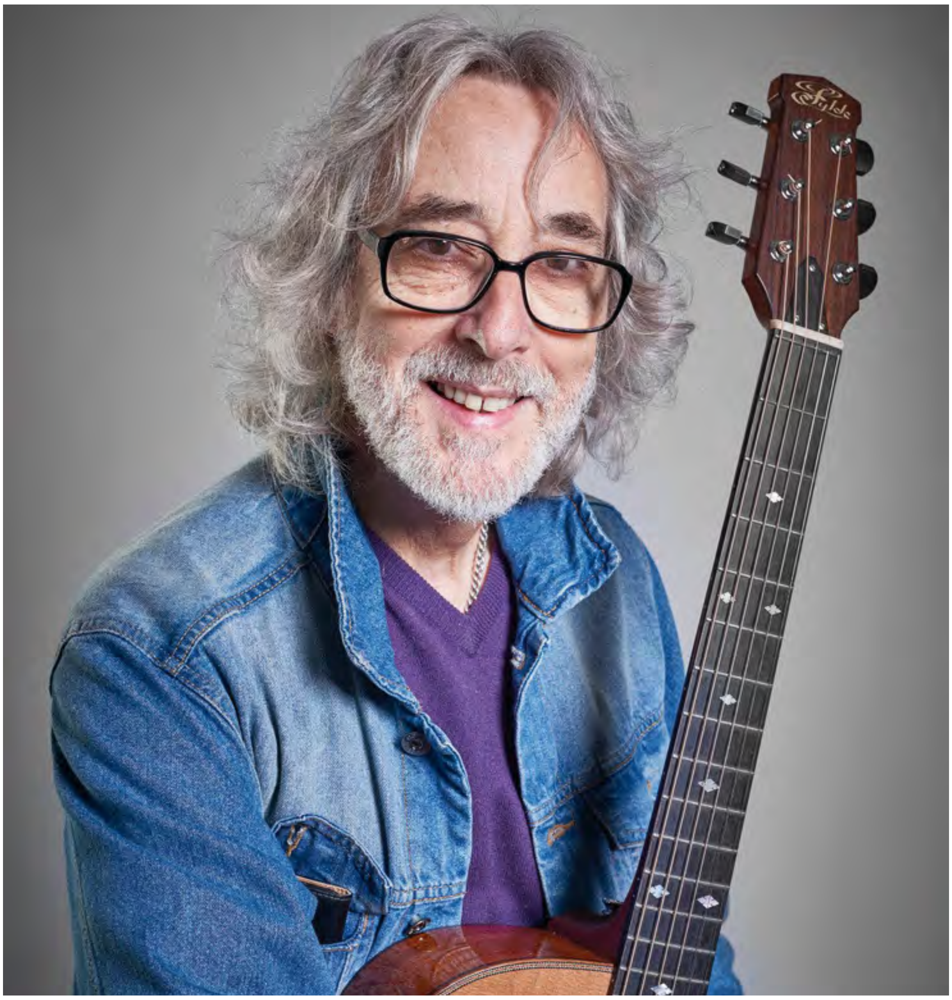
Gordon runs through a solo piece that can also work as a duet

TECHNIQUES SKILL LEVEL: ADVANCED

This month's piece, 'Rainbow Kites', is taken from a personal favourite album of mine: 1997's *Troubadour*.

Written in cannon form it can be performed straight from the page as a solo piece or as a duet with the second guitar playing one bar behind (or if you have a delay pedal it works in a similar way). I have performed this solo with a delay and as a duet with fellow *Acoustic* columnist Ray Burley and also with that fine picker Tristan Seume. Experiment with the delay pedal to find a tempo that suits you. The metronome setting of a dotted crotchet of 110 is just a guide.

One thing needs to be made clear from the start: the opening bar starts with a pull off from the 16th fret first string to the 12th fret on the same string. With a standard 14 fret to the body instrument you will need to stretch that fourth finger a bit to play the 16th fret cleanly. With a cutaway of course it make it that much easier. I have witnessed many times maestro Burley play this piece, and as a classical player with a 12th fret to the body instrument it is even more challenging. Bravo Raymond!



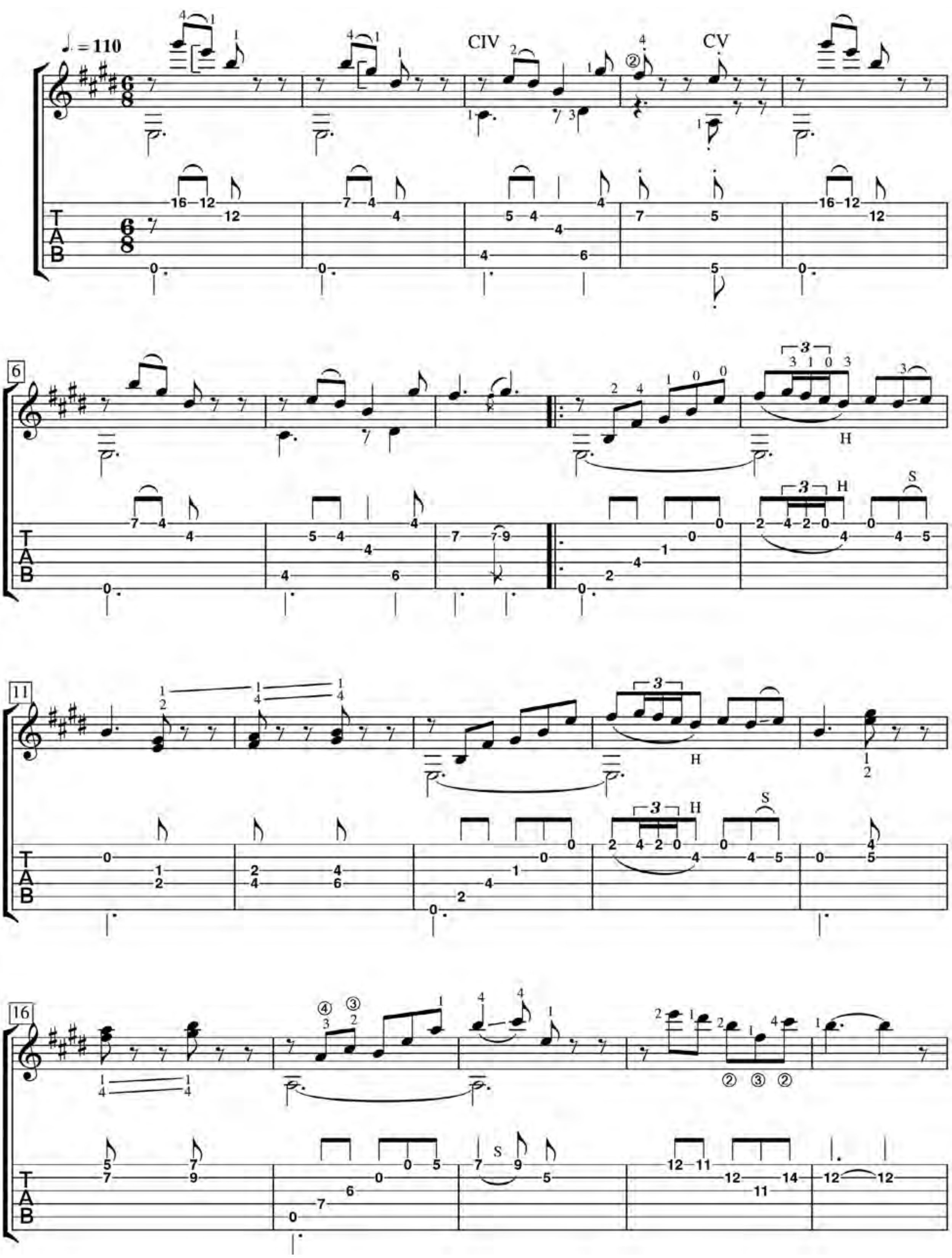
Throughout the tune, and what I describe as the verse, there is a very swift hammer-on and pull-off section. This happens in the following bars: 10, 14, 22, 50 and 54. Also take note of the fast slide and grace notes in bars eight, 23, 27, 32, 64 and 76.

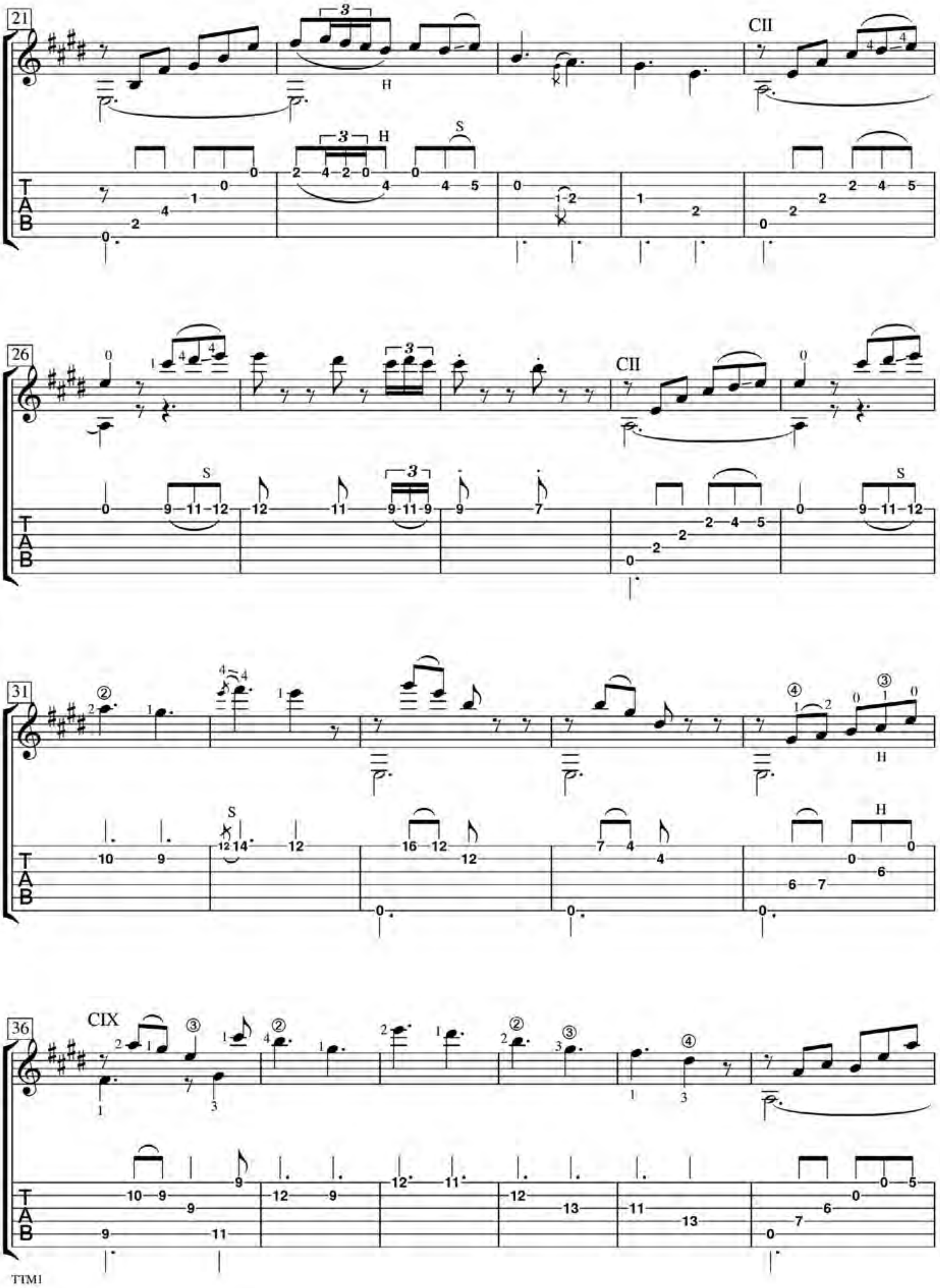
In bar four, I'm playing the A on the sixth string as opposed to playing the open A against the E note fretted on the fifth fret, second string. The reason for this is quite simple… it's the way I wrote it! By all means try them on the open strings as it's good to be flexible. As the great Vaughan Williams said many years ago: "A piece of music is never finished" or words to that effect!

One last thing: in bar 36 the jump up to the higher position from the previous bar may take a little while to master and many a guitar picking friend has found this challenging. Enjoy 'Rainbow Kites' and thanks for joining me. ■

You can find this piece and all my albums on iTunes. The piece can be downloaded along with many others by going to ***www.lathkillmusic.co.uk.***

‘RAINBOW KITES’ – GORDON GILTRAP





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CHRIS GIBBONS COMPOSER

3RDS AND 6THS IN MELODIES

Chris runs through a performance piece that'll sharpen up your intervallic skills

TECHNIQUES SKILL LEVEL: SUITABLE FOR ALL

In my last column, I introduced you to the idea of playing two notes at the same time in a fixed interval. We called these double-stops as two notes are 'stopped' or formed at the same time. This expression is taken from the technique vocabulary of the string family.

These were what we referred to as the 'sweet' sounding intervals of the 3rd and 6th. Simply put, the number of the interval refers to the number of scale steps between the notes. Let's take the example of the interval of the 6th. Here are the steps of the scale of C major:

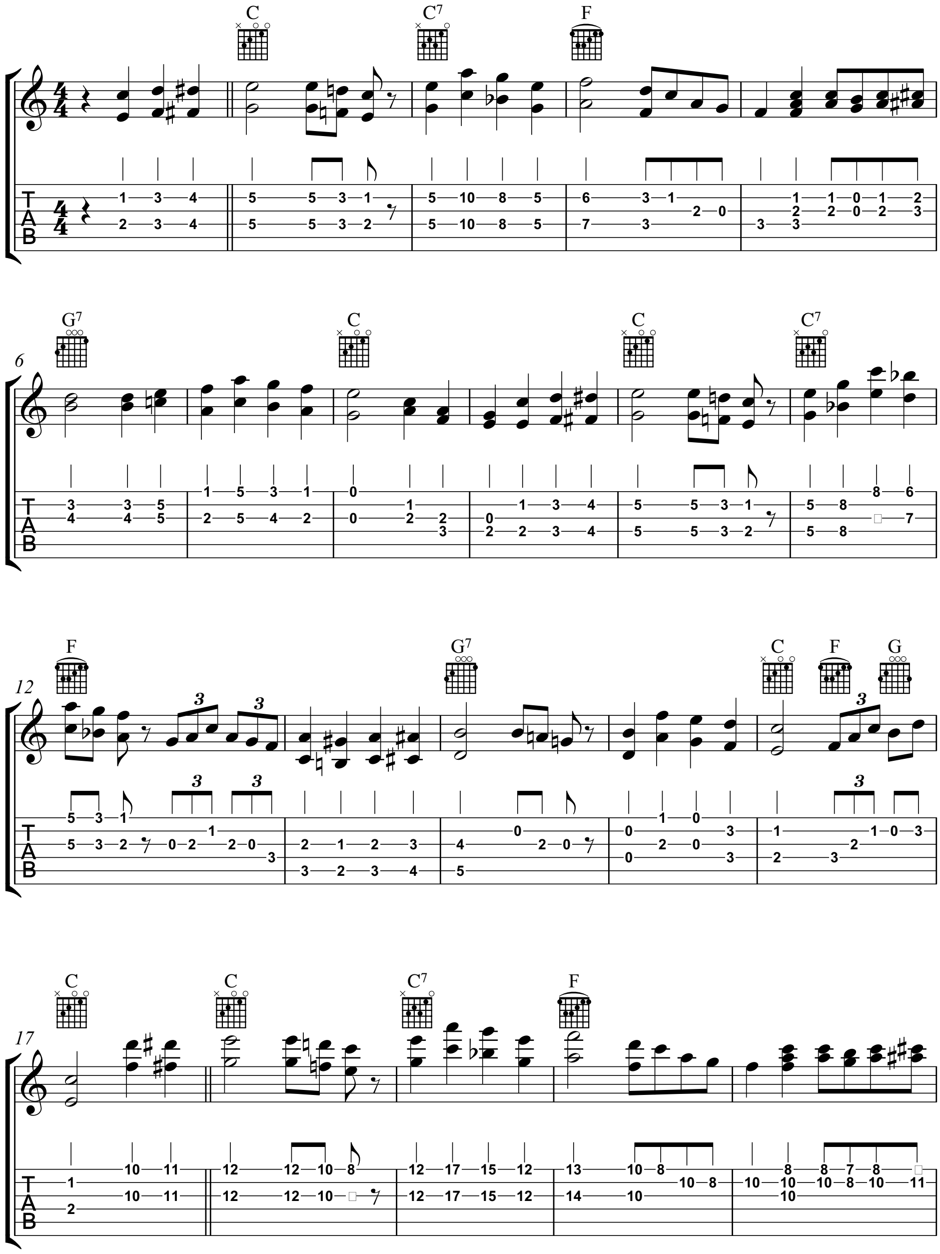
C D E F G A B C
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

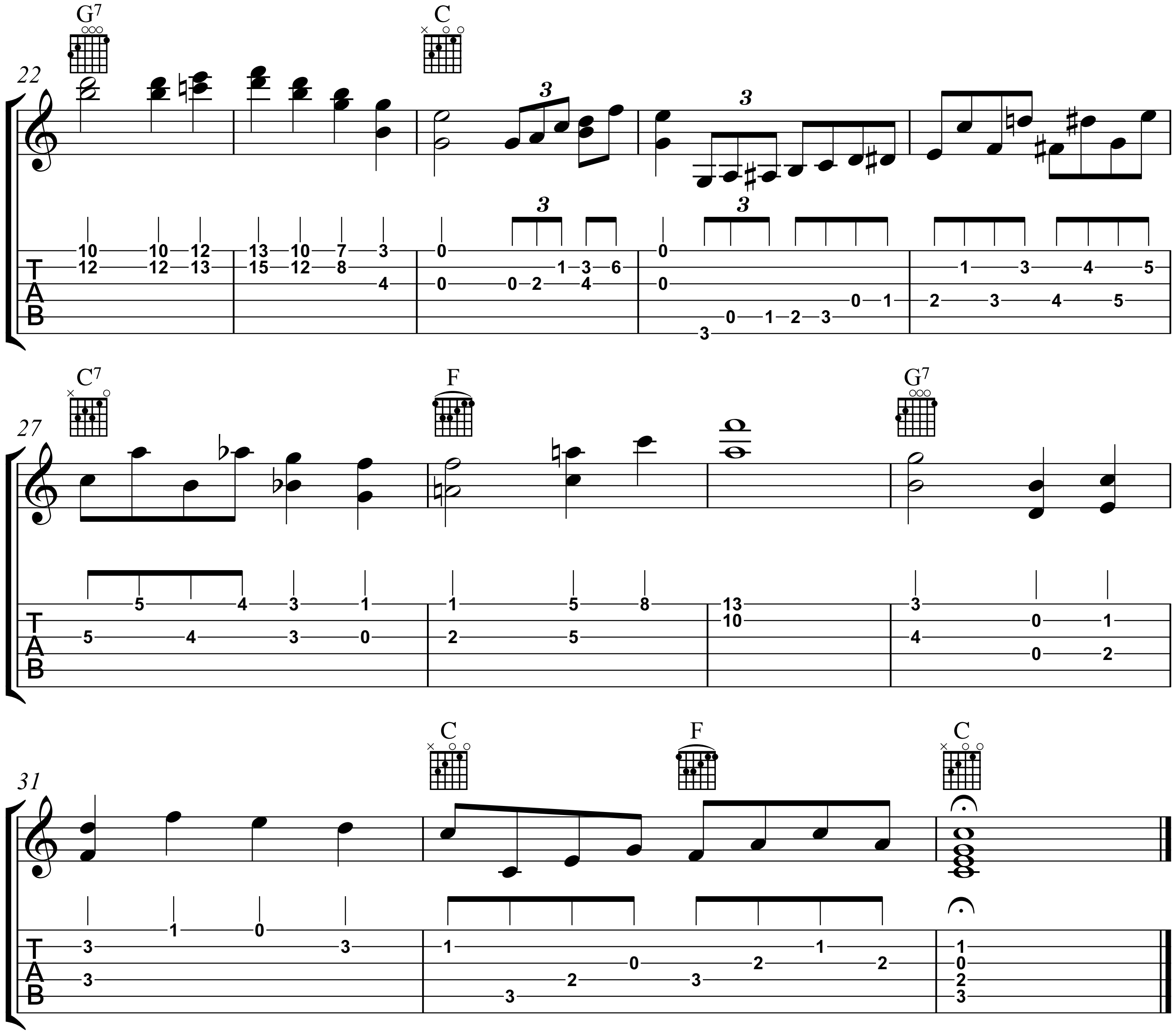
Thus from C to A the interval is the 6th, being 6 scale steps apart.

So when playing a melody, instead of just playing the note A, you can add the note C below the A to enrich and enhance the melody. Of course, the notes chosen would have to fit against the chord being strummed at the same time. In this instance, the chord could be an F or A minor; both these chords contain the notes A and C.

I have written a performance piece for you to explore these ideas, based on numerous country songs such as 'Wild Side Of Life'. First play the melody only, using the upper notes where there is a double-stop. In order to facilitate fingering in (where possible) the same left hand shape, we move up and down the fingerboard rather than across.

Playing just the upper note will familiarise you with the moves involved; these may seem unfamiliar to the way you are accustomed, but become logical when the complete piece is played containing the intervals.





So in the performance piece there are a few details I'd like to point out: firstly, the use of chromatic passing tones.

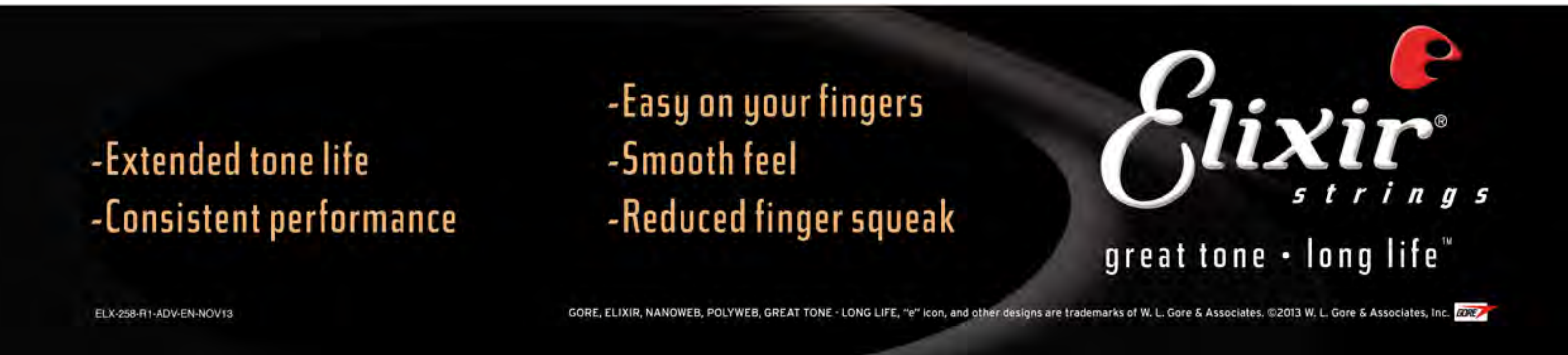
You see above I've set out the scale of C. Between the scale notes there are 'in between' notes that are not in the scale. So between C and D there is C# (if moving from C to D) or Db (if moving from D to C). C# and Db will both be on the same fret, they are just described differently depending on the direction of travel of the melody. The third notes of the tune right before the double bar line are D# and F#. These are chromatic passing tones between the notes before and after.

Because they are passing quickly it's not vital to harmonise these notes with a different chord, so a chord symbol at these chromatic points is ignored.

The second point is one of ease of movement; for example, during the first four bars, all the fingering is resolved onto the second and thirds strings using an up-the-neck movement. This makes much more sense than playing 'in position' where you'd stay in one area on the fretboard, thus making the fingering needlessly fussy.

At bars 18-24 the theme is repeated in the upper register, creating a real 'lift' to the tune. I've also used 'broken' intervals in bars 25-27, where the melody skips between the lower and higher notes of the interval, creating more animation. The closer harmony of the interval of the 3rd is used at bar five and 21-23. This is less open and punchier sounding than the 6ths used elsewhere.

I trust you'll enjoy this piece and will be able to use the techniques in your compositions and jam sessions. Take it slowly and learn in bite-sized chunks, which you can then fit together until you become confident in executing the entire study. ■



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VOICE LEADING

Carl Orr of Rockschool gets us thinking like a pianist

TECHNIQUES SKILL LEVEL: SUITABLE FOR ALL

I compose music almost every day, and in my constant quest to avoid writing the same song over and over, I am always experimenting with chords and searching for new chord voicings.

As we all know, this isn't so easy on the guitar. Unlike on keyboard instruments, where everything is laid out in front of us in a simple and obvious way, on the guitar we inevitably and unavoidably tend to think of the familiar 'box' shapes we have learned from friends, teachers or chord diagrams. There is no question that these boxes are an indispensable tool for learning chords and understanding the guitar, but they can be restrictive too.

However, many years ago I was chatting with the late, great master guitarist Ike Isaacs, and he showed me some beautiful chords which moved smoothly and effortlessly from each one to the next through the use of voice leading. This short demonstration opened my imagination up to a completely different way of thinking about chords, which I make use of every day.

Voice leading enables the notes of one chord to simply and logically lead to the notes of the next chord. To achieve smooth voice leading, it is important that each note moves the shortest possible distance to the next chord.

As you can see in **example 1** there are three notes in the first chord, C major; from the bottom up, they are G (fifth), C (tonic) and E (major third).

The second chord, F major contains the notes F (tonic), A (major third) and C (fifth). In order to move as smoothly as possible, each note in the C chord moves the shortest possible distance to the nearest available chord tone in the F chord.

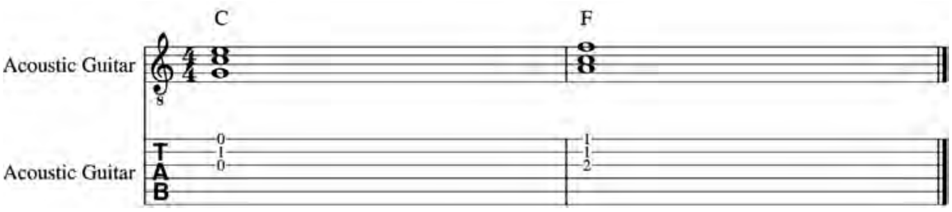
The C note on the B string first fret is a common tone between the two chords, so that note doesn't move at all. The E note at the top of the chord moves up by one fret to F, and the G at the bottom of the chord moves a whole tone up to A.

An interesting aspect of voice leading is that the bass notes don't have to follow voice leading, but they can simply establish the root note or another selected bass note, regardless of distance from one note to the next as in **example 2**.

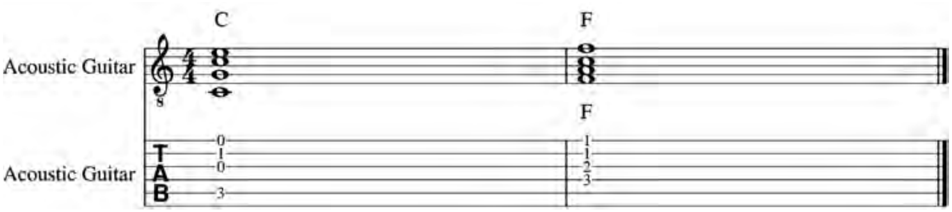
In **example 3** I have applied this principle to a few more chords. Notice how each voice of the chords produces a kind of simple melody.

Example 4 is the top note (top voice) of each chord; try singing this melody line (an octave down if it's too high for you) as you play the chord voicings. **Example 5** shows the middle voice of each chord and **example 6** the lower

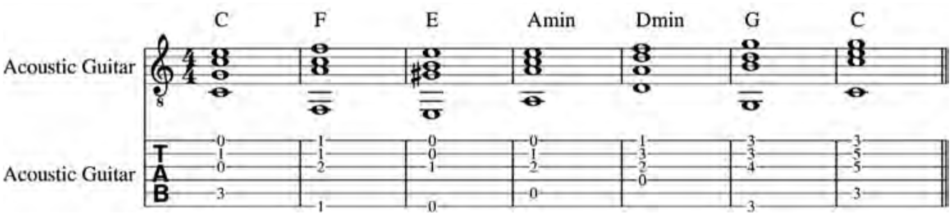
EXAMPLE 1



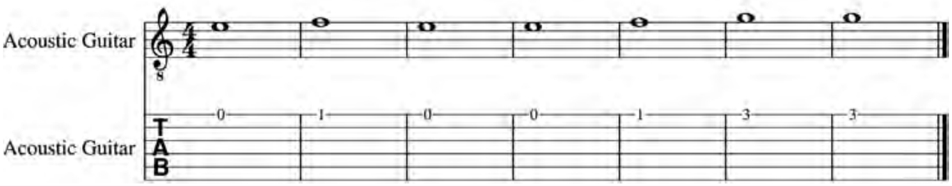
EXAMPLE 2



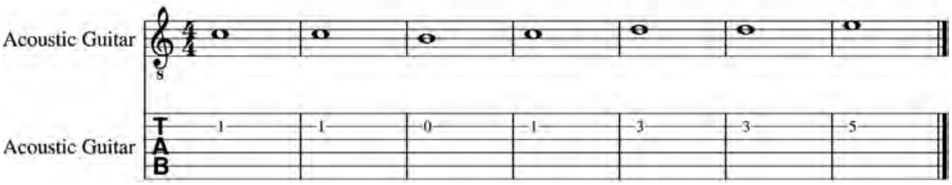
EXAMPLE 3



EXAMPLE 4



EXAMPLE 5



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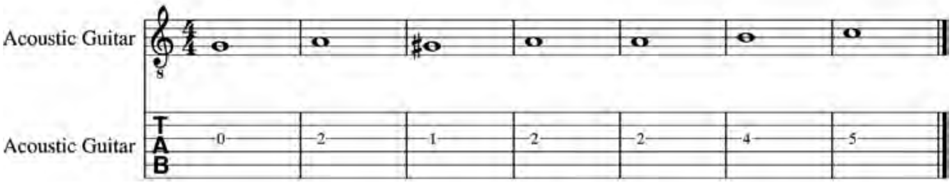
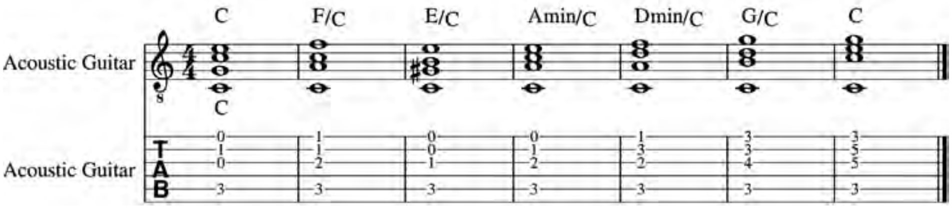
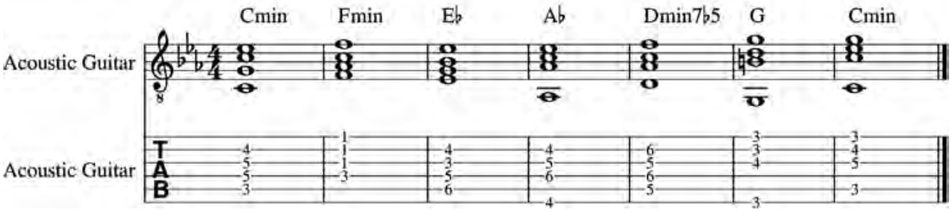


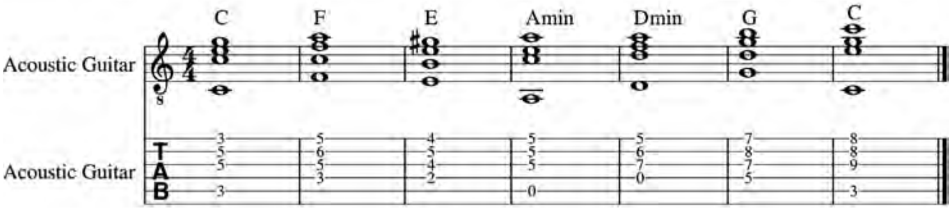
EXAMPLE 7



EXAMPLE 8



EXAMPLE 9



> **"When we think of chords in this way, it liberates us from the usual box shapes and the inevitable 'blindness' that goes along with them and enables us to think anew about chords"**

voice. Sing each voice of the chord over the chords so you really hear how they work.

In this **example 7** I have kept the bass note a static C note under the chord voicings, creating an intriguing effect.

Another interesting approach – as shown in **example 8** – is to take the original chord inversions and convert the whole thing into the key of C minor.

And finally, in **example 9**, I will start from a higher inversion of the first chord and continue logically from there.

When we think of chords in this way, it liberates us from the usual box shapes and the inevitable 'blindness' that goes along with them and enables us to think anew about chords – 'thinking outside the box' in a literal sense. This way of approaching chords is closer to how pianists think than how most guitarists think.

I hope you have enjoyed this brief exploration of voice leading. Maybe you can explore further by writing out your own chord sequences and voice leading chords through them. ■

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RICHARD GILEWITZ FINGERSTYLE GUITARIST

TACKLING SLIDE

Richard gives us a crash course in slide playing

TECHNIQUES SKILL LEVEL: SUITABLE FOR ALL

A few years back I created *Slide Guide*, an educational course with TrueFire that covers many of the essentials for playing slide guitar. I'd like to reiterate some of the highlights to help you explore this new ground if you haven't played slide guitar before or wish to add an ingredient to your current skill set.

In the full disc I cover three separate open tunings, G, D and C. For this article I narrow the perspective to open C Tuning and include a small batch of slide moves to attempt and some fingerings for both the left and right hands while fretting and fingerpicking.

First – the tuning: tune your low E down two whole steps to a C, the fifth string A down to a G, fourth string D down to a C and second string B up a half step to a C. So low to high is now: C G C G C E.

SELECTING A SLIDE

It often comes down to a personal choice which slide you use – but consider the material you will be playing, the instrument you are using and the sound you like to achieve.

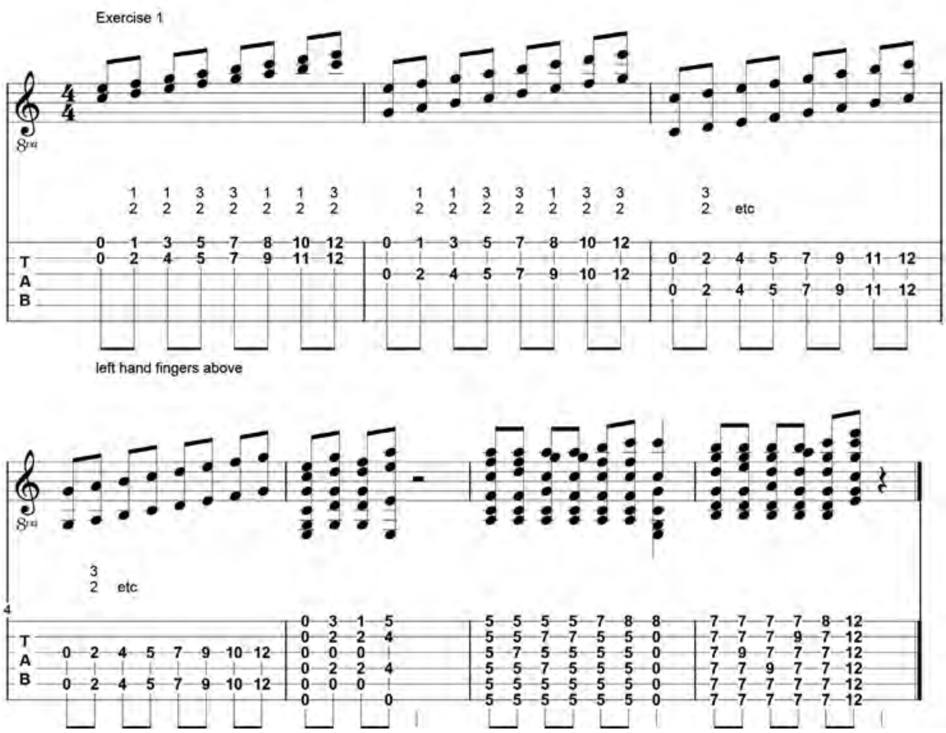
Another factor is string choice. From 80/20 bright bronze to phosphor bronze, flat wound, coated strings, silk and steel – they will all sound different. Experiment and don't settle for whatever strings are on your instrument at the time you take up the slide. String gauge is another consideration. A heavier gauge set will produce a richer and thicker tone, but will require more effort for chord fingerings.

THE FRETTING HAND

Look at some fretting fingers and locations to try out with the remaining three fingers while the slide is on your finger. I like to place the slide on my left-hand pinky since I am right handed. The trick is to maintain the stability of the slide so it stays on your finger while fretting shapes or locations with your fingers.

I often brace my left-hand ring finger against the side of the slide to maintain stability. The middle finger doesn't do anything, but it's the index finger that is the real driving force of the slide – almost acting like a car's steering wheel and driver for the slide's movements. If done right, as the index finger touches all of the strings, its dampening effect reduces all of the extraneous sizzle and string rattle sounds completely. Or, if the index is lifted, you can control that same sizzle and rattle as a distinct, emotional and bluesy ingredient.

EXAMPLE 1 – OPEN C POSITIONS

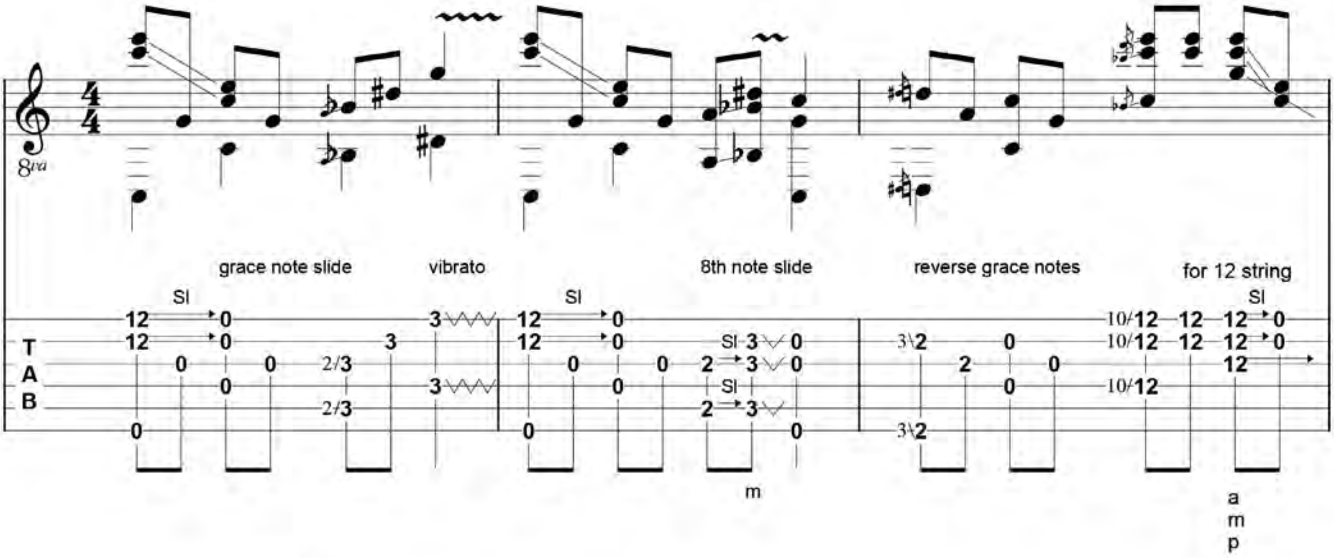


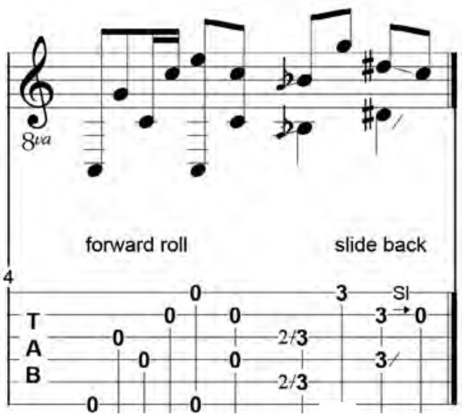
Example 1 is not really an example, but a collection of bars for fretting finger shapes while holding the slide in place. Sometimes playing in an open tuning can feel like being in a cul-de-sac, since much of your background in theory feels like a dead end.

I look at what lives in an open tuning, then try to communicate with finger position charades on another planet where no language will work. I'm sure I could figure out the names of these chords or partial chords theoretically, but in the case of open tunings I like to allow for the opportunity to simply explore blindly on purpose.

Attempt some of your own instinctive rhythms and picking patterns with these

EXAMPLE 2 – OPEN C SLIDE LICKS





various shapes to see what shows up, but try to avoid too much information. Don't play nonstop, but try to play a two-beat rhythm or four-note picking pattern. Then let things breathe for a couple of beats. My own teacher once said, "I don't think a lot of musicians know how to effectively use silence in music." Allow for a beat or two, or even more, to have a brief moment of contemplation while you focus on your breathing or body posture.

After you have practised with the slide being on your finger while attempting some of the fingering positions, take a crack at **example 2**, which contains open C slide licks that actually use the slide. Here are some tips on each of the individual bars and what the notations mean.

Bar one: As stated in the notation you will see that a variety of details are included here – a glissando slide, a grace note slide and a vibrato with the slide along with a variation on the number of strings covered with the slide.

In beat one, only cover strings one and two with the slide while guiding behind with your index finger. As you descend avoid touching string three with the slide as you will want to play that note as an open string. Be sure to lift the slide off on beat two as you will need to pinch strings four, two and one simultaneously. Try to relax as the slide simply disappears from the strings as you arrive at the fret of your choice, around fret 10, a good place for starters. Then be willing to go further along the fingerboard.

On beat three you will lay the slide down on all six strings at fret two just over the fret bar to the right of where you would normally finger a note within the fret. Shoot the slide to fret three as fast as possible to create the exciting grace note slide. Be sure to dampen behind the slide with your index finger.

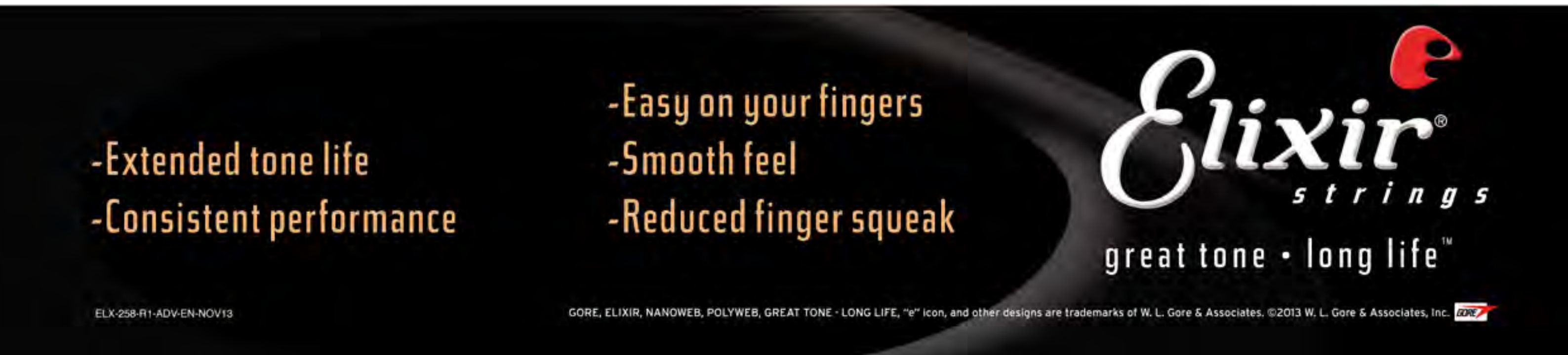
On beat four either maintain the dampening or lift the index finger and move your slide, still making contact with the strings, back and forth (left to right) rapidly creating a vibrato effect.

Bar two: The main thing to notice about bar two is that on beat three you do not shoot the slide to the third fret from two, but moved in a more relaxed manner and treated as an eighth note. Upon arrival only the second string is struck with your '*m*' or middle finger. Before playing the open strings on beat four apply a less demonstrative vibrato.

Bar three: This bar has an interesting reversal as you will attempt rapid descending grace notes move with the slide. Begin by covering all six strings with the slide on fret three, and after the initial pluck, shoot the slide back to fret two. Following the open strings on beat two, a three-finger pinch pattern occurs as you shoot the slide in the opposite direction from frets 10 to 12. On beat four reverse directions with the slide and drift off, but with an eighth note duration for the descent. Notice by this point we have covered the slide moving over a quarter note beat, an eighth note beat, a grace note movement and a drift off – all in just three bars.

Bar four: In this case we deal with a series of sixteenth notes plucked with the fingerpicking hand in rapid succession followed by a pair of open-string eighth notes. Notice the specific plucking hand fingers suggested. I rarely like to use the same plucking finger twice in a row, so on beat four if I pinch with my thumb and middle fingers I borrow the index finger to pluck the final note.

Best of luck to you and remember that good slide playing is a limited number of moves to be perfected over a lifetime of playing. ■



SIMON MAYOR UK MANDOLIN MAESTRO

BACK TO BASICS

Simon Mayor reviews some 'universal truths' of good mandolin technique

TECHNIQUES SKILL LEVEL: SUITABLE FOR ALL

Time flies (clichés are usually true!), and amazingly it's over 11 years since my first contribution to *Acoustic*. The magazine's original editor Steve Harvey had asked me for a piece for the first issue, a guide for guitarists wanting to switch to the mandolin. Reading it again made me realise that, in explaining the differences between the two instruments, I was really writing a basic beginner's guide to the mandolin. Anyone who had already developed a dexterity on guitar would simply progress a lot faster on a mandolin than a complete musical novice.

In 11 years I've contributed many performance pieces in this column, some of them quite technically demanding, but given an evolving readership, it seemed a good time to review the most basic principles. So for the benefit of the complete beginner, the guitarist crossing over, or indeed the longer-term player who wants to ditch any bad habits, here they are.

The mandolin is a small, plucked, fretted, stringed instrument with roots in the Mediterranean area, notably Italy. It's now popular everywhere and has enjoyed parallel evolutionary paths in both its construction and its music styles. Think of a genre and I guarantee someone will be playing it on a mandolin.

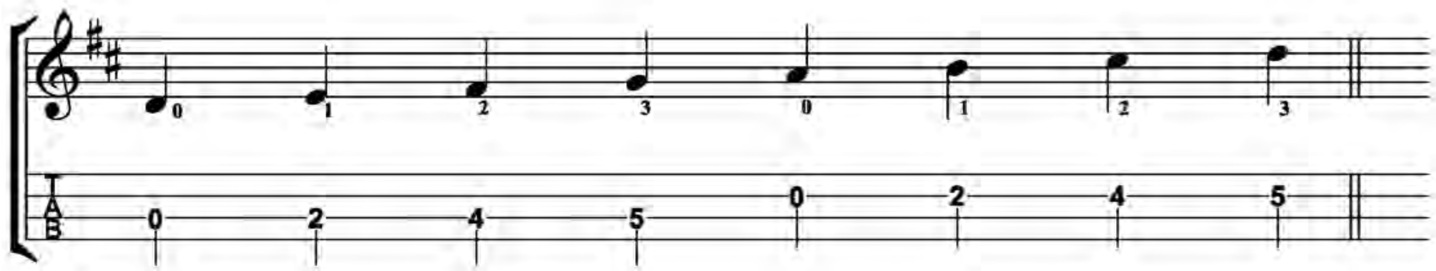
Because it is small, its strings are short and give high sounds. Like any stringed instrument, we can change the pitch of a particular string by pressing it down onto the fingerboard, shortening its vibrating length. We are guided in this by the frets, the pieces of metal set into the fingerboard. By pressing the string down just behind a fret, we get the correct intonation of a particular note, assuming the mandolin is correctly tuned to begin with (get yourself a digital tuner). The tuning is GDAE (ascending), where the low G corresponds in pitch to the third string of a guitar, and the high E to a guitar's top string played at the 12th fret. In fact, the tuning is exactly that of the violin, and because of this, violinists, like guitarists, are tempted to take up the mandolin as a second instrument

Nevertheless, there are some important differences between the mandolin and violin, some obvious, some not so: the mandolin is plucked with a plectrum rather than bowed (a mandolin's bridge is flat, whereas a violin's is arched to allow the bow to play each of the strings discretely); the mandolin has four courses of double strings tuned in unison, whereas the violin has four single strings, the double strings offering a much smoother sound when played tremolo; the scale length of a mandolin is usually longer than that of a violin, so the left hand stretch is greater; and finally, the tension of mandolin strings is higher than those of a violin, making it a little tougher on the fingertips of the left hand.

In most cases, mandolin fingering is the same as on a violin, so if you have a nifty left hand as a violinist and a great right hand technique as a plectrum guitarist, you'll make a sensational mandolin player!

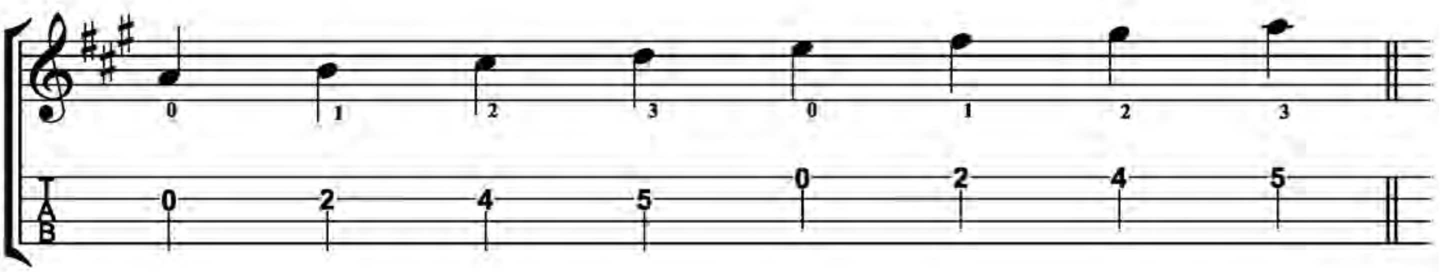
There aren't many similarities between the fingering patterns of a guitar and a mandolin's. Guitarists will generally play the 'one-fret-per-finger' rule, where the first finger covers notes on the first fret, the second finger notes on the second fret, and so on. This is rare on a mandolin – its scale is much shorter, so players generally play 'two-frets-per-finger', where the first finger covers notes on the first two frets, the second finger notes on the third and fourth fret, and so on. With this in mind, take a look how we finger this simple major scale of D major:

SCALE OF D



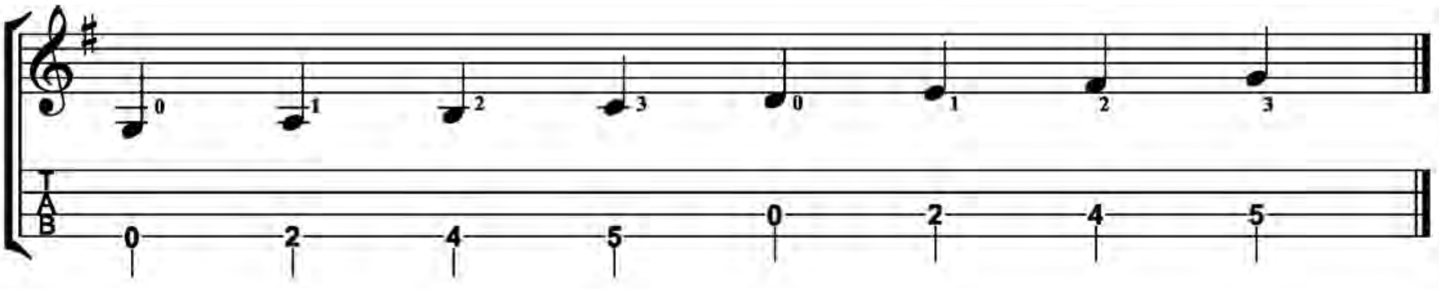
The lower tablature staff shows which frets on which string to press down, the little numbers by the notes above show which left hand finger to use ('0' is an open string). Now we come to one great advantage a mandolin has over a guitar: the interval (a fifth) between each string is the same. Because of this 'symmetrical' tuning you'll find that once you've learned a fingering pattern you can move it across strings to change the key with no trouble at all. So, having played D major, it's easy to play A major:

SCALE OF A



Notice that while you're now playing the top two strings rather than the middle two, the fingering pattern you're using is exactly the same. Now move the same pattern onto the bottom two strings and you've got the scale of G major:

SCALE OF G



Once again, you've changed the pitch and the key, but not the pattern. As you progress and learn to play higher up the neck, avoiding any open strings, you'll find this symmetrical tuning immensely intuitive. The scales we've just played are very simple examples, but the ability to change key by moving a phrase or even an entire tune across strings, or up and down the neck without having to re-think the fingering is, for me, one of the mandolin's most endearing features.

We can't conclude without noting two more things: the basic 'attitudes' of the left and right hand. By this, I mean the way the hand is held and approaches the mandolin.

Let's stay with the left hand for the moment. Cradle the neck between your thumb and first finger. Don't let it fall fully into your palm, but rest it gently between the first thumb joint and the side of the finger. The thumb will protrude 2 or 3mm above the fingerboard; the gap between the back of the neck and your hand should be big enough to waggle a pencil through. Don't support the instrument's weight with the left hand; either sit and cradle it in your lap or use a strap.

Now curl your fingers round in a tight arch over the strings. Each joint should be bent (don't let any collapse) with the final one falling near, perpendicularly, onto the fingerboard, so that as you fret one string you don't catch the one next to it. Notice that as your fingers approach the fingerboard they are not in line with the frets, but angled a little towards the instrument's body, pointing roughly in the direction of your eyes rather than over your left shoulder. This is more akin to a violinist's hand position than a classical guitarist's, and something that most people find naturally comfortable on a mandolin.

The right hand wields the plectrum, and this is far more than something which merely sets the strings vibrating, but a means to mould both the tone and dynamics. There is no one correct type of plectrum, but for now choose a medium gauge, at around 0.8mm.

Curl your right hand fingers gently inwards and rest the plectrum across the last joint of the first finger as shown. Now grip it with the ball of your thumb, allowing just a millimetre or two to protrude. Think of the pressure you use to hold a knife and fork; this should be similar – not too light or too firm.

Waggle it about a bit and get used to the feel. Try playing the open strings just with down strokes, getting used to the resistance of the strings as the notes sound. You may have to tighten your grip if the plectrum flies from your hand, or relax a little if the resistance feels too great. There should be some 'give' as it crosses the string.

There are different approaches, playing styles, plectrum choices, string gauge and more, but here I've presented the absolute basics, the 'universal truths' if you like, for whatever style you pick. ■

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MIKE DAWES FINGERSTYLE VIRTUOSO

‘OVERLOAD’

Mike takes us into the chorus theme of his track ‘Overload’

TECHNIQUES SKILL LEVEL: ADVANCED

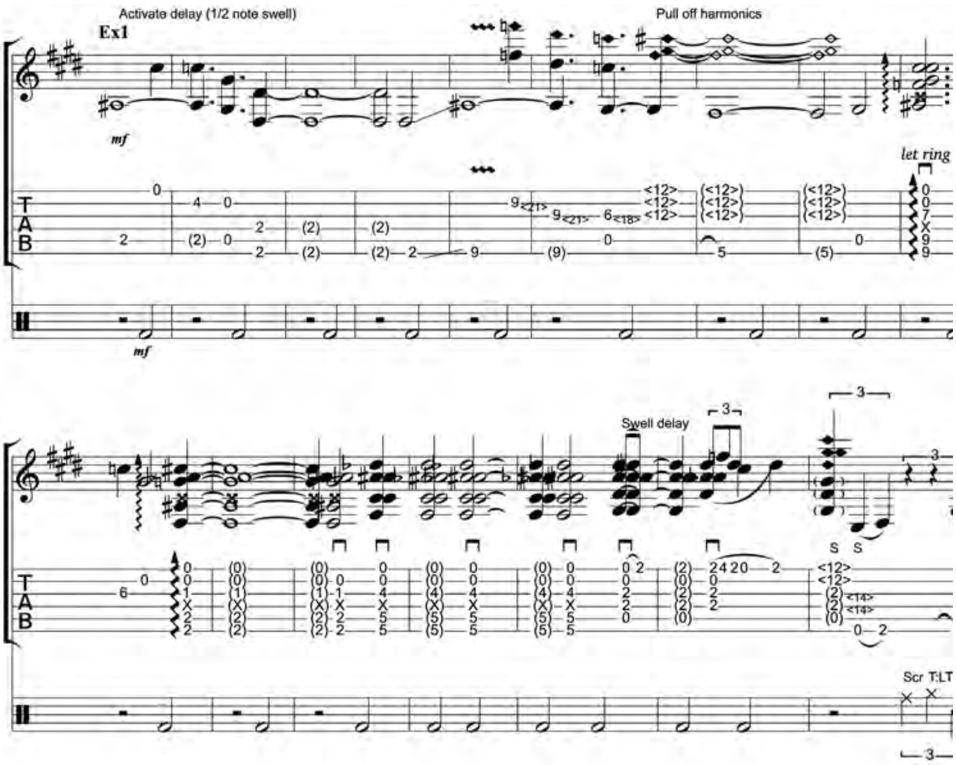
It’s time to dive into part three of my latest hyper-technical and overbearing noodlefest, ‘Overload’. In this issue we will be looking at the chorus theme of the piece. I hope you are doing OK with the previous sections as once this chorus hits, you will be cursing skyward. Good luck!

As before we are in C#G#C#F#G#C# tuning, which is essentially DADGAD tuning down a semitone. The reason I drop down for pieces like this is to create a heavier sound and get a bit more ‘give’ out of the lower strings to enhance those subtle bends. The ‘Overload’ video is available to view on YouTube, just search my name.

The prelude to our first chorus, found in **example 1**, features some live manipulation of delay, ‘pull off harmonics’ and a much more relaxing vibe as a contrast to the rest of the piece. You’ll notice that the melody here directly references the rhythm of the tune’s main riff. The idea here is that the two themes are directly related but in stark contrast.

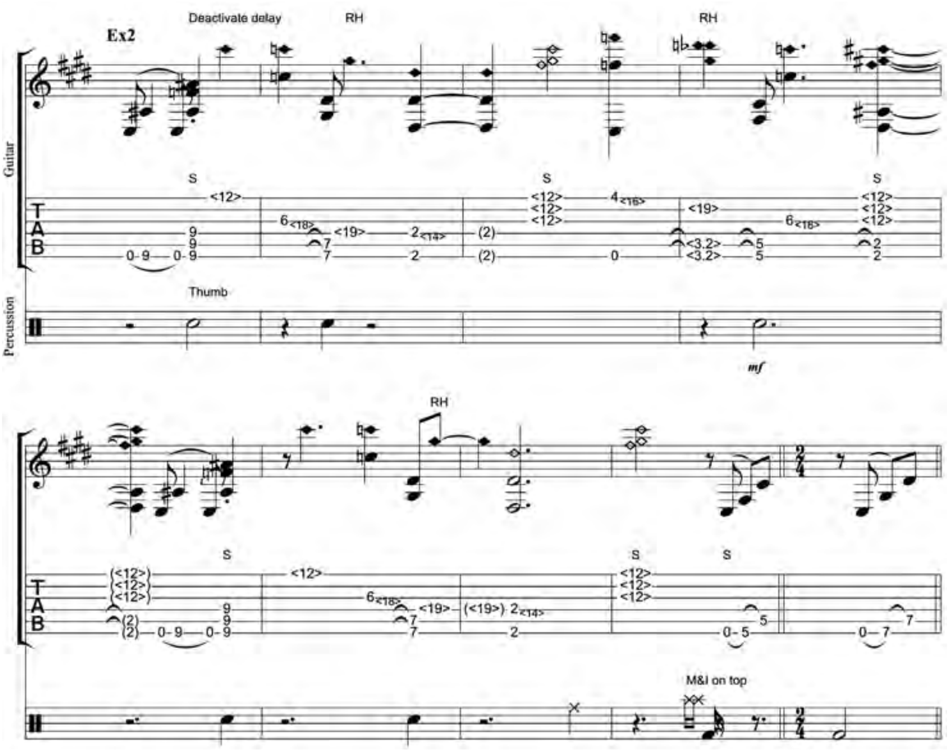
In this section we start with a simple single-note bass part accompanying a melody over multiple strings. The reason I chose to spread the melody over the top strings is to fill space and create a legato feel. This is a common technique in fingerstyle. The third beat of most bars features a simple kick drum rhythm in the right hand. To produce this, strike the top of your guitar above the soundhole. The ‘pull off harmonics’ in the sixth bar are produced by touching the 12th fret with the right hand as the left hand ‘pulls off’ from the sixth fret G string downwards. The ‘swelling’ of the delay is produced by holding down the delay patch button I’m using on the Strymon Timeline, a wonderful pedal that allows you to feed the delay into itself on the fly. Additional percussion notes at the end can be found in the full TAB for the song, or seen on the YouTube video. Now we are into the meat of the section. The chorus is split into four cycles. Four painful, painful cycles...

EXAMPLE 1

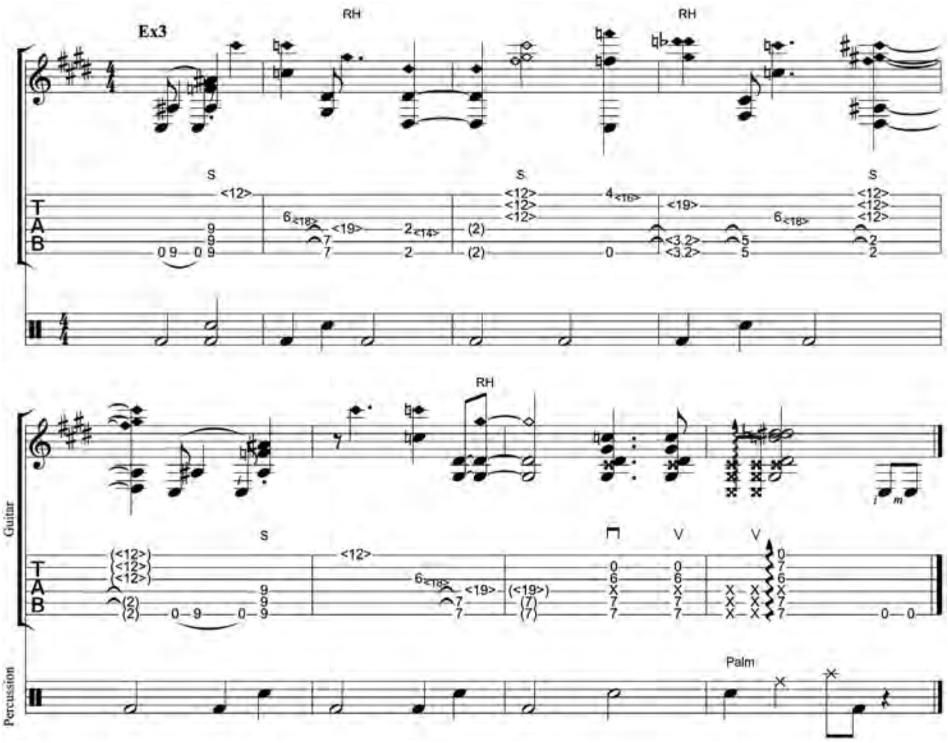


“The reason I drop down for pieces like this is to create a heavier sound and get more ‘give’ out of the lower strings”

EXAMPLE 2



EXAMPLE 3



As you can see in **example 2,** there is plenty going on here in this first cycle. We have a progressive rock rhythm in the bass and power chords, accompanied by sporadic percussion and the previous melody as a harmonic variation. The tough part is combining right handed and artificial harmonics with unusual hammered and pulled chords in the left hand. The way I achieve this on a mental level is by imagining each few beats as a 'shape' and eventually letting muscle memory take over. Watch out for the left-handed hammered third fret harmonics!

The second cycle (**example 3**) is almost identical to the first. The main addition, which admittedly makes it a whole lot trickier, is the addition of a consistent 'kick drum'. The way to achieve this is to practise not just the 'kick drum' alone, but find sweet spots on your guitar where you are able to reach those harmonics and strike the top with the heel of your hand. This is undoubtedly the hardest part of the piece to perform.

I will briefly explain what makes part three and four of the chorus different in the next issue. I think two months is enough time for you to really get stuck into this. Don't forget to check the previous issues for those previous sections, and remember to check out the official video for 'Overload' on YouTube. Best of luck everyone and enjoy the music! ■

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RAYMOND BURLEY CLASSICAL GUITARIST

BACH'S CORRENTE

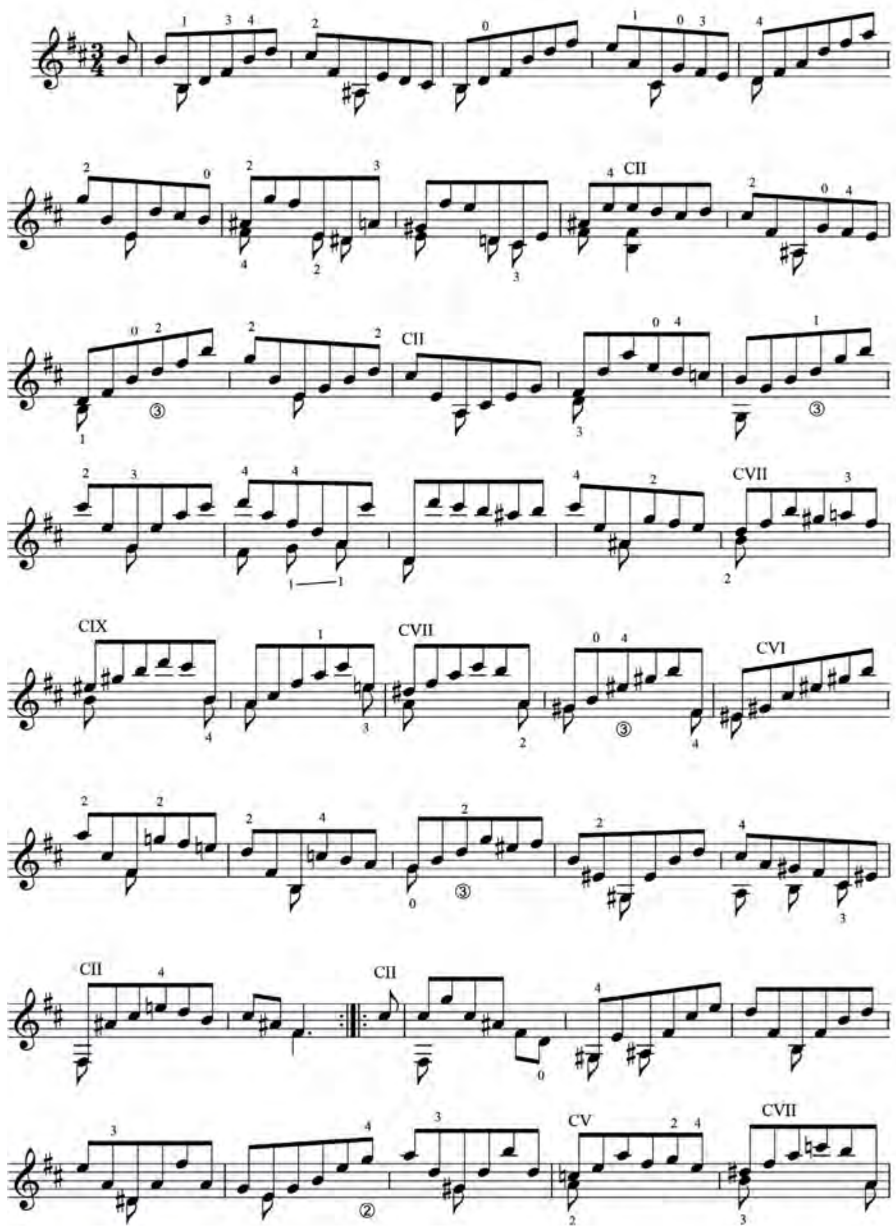
Ray takes us through a tricky JS Bach arrangement

TECHNIQUES SKILL LEVEL: ADVANCED

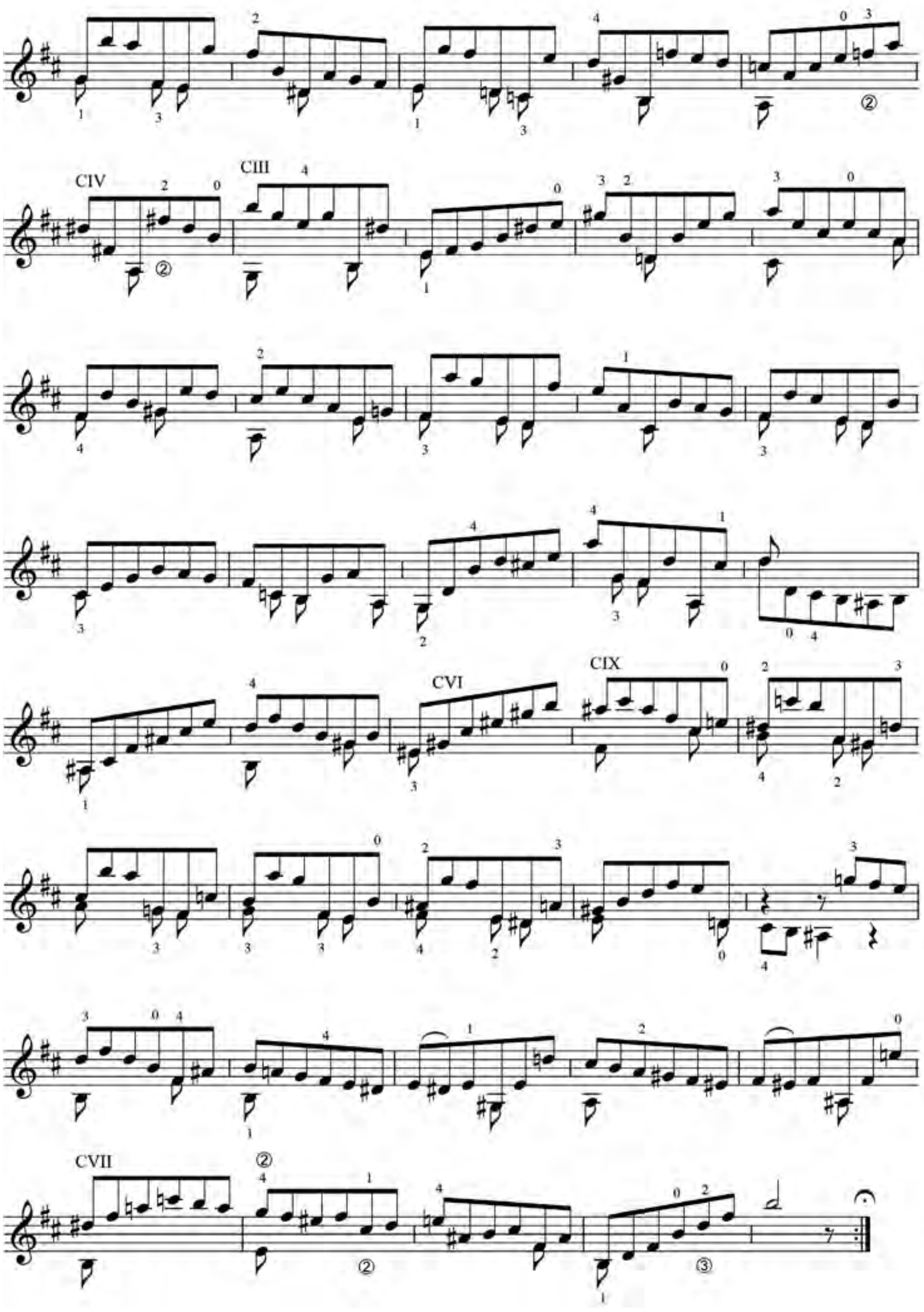
The piece I've chosen to concentrate on this time is a *corrente* by Bach. As I've mentioned in earlier articles, Bach wrote nothing for the guitar. He produced a quite substantial amount for the lute, although much of this comprised arrangements of existing pieces: a violin partita, a cello suite, a fugue and a prelude. There are several other pieces where the intended instrument is unclear: possibly lute or maybe lute-harpsichord – a keyboard instrument fitted with gut strings.

A *corrente* (also *courante*, *corant* or *coranto*) is a dance in triple time that originated in the late renaissance and continued through

CORRENTE – J.S.BACH



“A corrente (also courante, corant or coranto) is a dance in triple time that originated in the late renaissance and continued through the baroque period”



the baroque period. *Courante* literally means ‘running’; the Italian form of the dance is quick and flowing, however the French *courante* is more stately and majestic. Bach uses both forms, for example the Suite in E Minor (BWV 996) employs the French form while the current piece is clearly Italian. This particular *corrente* is taken from Bach’s First Partita (suite) for Unaccompanied Violin in B minor (BWV 1002) – it comprises an *allemande* and a following *double* (a variation with shorter note values), a *corrente* and *double*, a *sarabande* and *couble* and finally a *bourrée* and *double*. The original key has been retained for the guitar arrangement.

If the original key has been used, what makes it an arrangement? Some guitarists are prepared to play Bach’s violin works direct from the original text, and certainly there is an argument for doing so: playing what Bach wrote rather than what we think he might have written had it been adapted by him for harpsichord, lute or guitar. It’s known that one of Bach’s pupils Johann Agricola heard him playing the violin sonatas and partitas on the harpsichord spontaneously adding extra voices, harmonies and bass notes. I prefer to add just a few supporting bass notes. The original scores are readily available and I urge you to consult these before simply accepting my edition.

The piece is in the style of a ‘*moto perpetuo*’ and, once a tempo has been decided, the main technical hurdle is achieving the required degree of *legato*. My suggestion for a performance tempo would be somewhere in the region of crotchet = 120, but, of course, a much more leisurely pace should be employed at the outset. Dynamics were not included in the original. As with many baroque dances the piece is in binary form: first half with repeat, second half with repeat. Some ornamentation could be added but your chosen tempo may not allow this.

In bar 33 you may question the printed G in what is otherwise an F sharp major chord – but this is exactly what Bach wrote. Is it an error? We’ll never know. The entire partita lies well on the guitar but don’t expect an easy ride. ■

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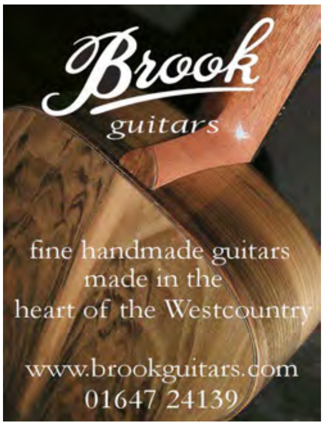

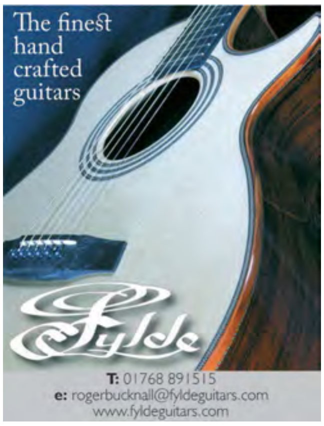

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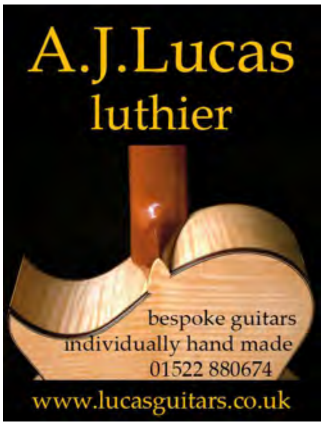

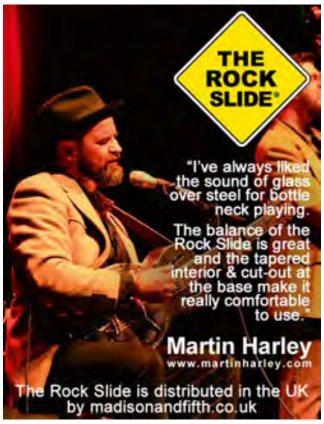

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A FUNNY NOTE

Andy Pritchard enjoys a day out at the London Acoustic Show, and finds himself beguiled by Lowdens, ponytails and Panama hats

Well, I don't know what you were doing on Saturday 10 September but I made my first ever visit to the London Acoustic Show at Olympia and – stack me! – what a joy it was. Imagine a space crammed full of some of the best guitar manufacturers in the world all flaunting their wares, as it were, and encouraging you to try them out. Lord have mercy…

Having arrived at Olympia and had my shoulder bag searched by a very nice man, I was directed to take the lift to the third floor. In the lift was a lovely attendant whose job it was to press the buttons… I kid you not, the next time someone complains to me that their job is boring, I'm going to have to put them straight. As the doors opened and I bid farewell to my new friend, I was assaulted by the sights, sounds and smells of the London Acoustic Show. Never have I seen so many grey pony-tailed men in one place. What is the collective noun, I wonder, for such beings? A discord of ponytails, a wisdom of ponytails? Who knows. Anyway, having shown my ticket and secured my luminous green wristband I set forth on my first recce.

Being the proud owner of a Lowden F23 it was to their stand that I ventured first, where I had the pleasure of meeting Julie Hautecoeur, a lovely lady who works at the Lowden factory in Downpatrick, Co. Down on the 'Dolphin Profile' soundboard bracing. That's great in itself isn't it? To go somewhere where, not only do you get the chance to play these fantastic guitars but the opportunity to talk to someone who makes them. There was a whole range of beauties on the stand and I was checking out a fan fret beastie when my eye was taken by a striking F35 in sinker redwood with African blackwood back and sides and a bevelled shoulder. Oh my, what a stunning guitar. It played like a dream with that distinctive Lowden feel, and the tone was just gorgeous. I got into conversation with Chris from Coda Music who was saying that those redwoods could live for 700 to 800 years. The 'sinker' tag means that they then sat on the bottom of a river for another 100 odd years protected by the silt, so the soundboard on that guitar could easily be approaching 1000 years old! I was just deciding whether to stick one of my kidneys on eBay to enable a more permanent union, when a 15-year-old lad in a jaunty Panama hat appeared and started playing Tommy Emmanuel pieces effortlessly… I decided it was time to avail myself of the facilities. Regarding the fan fret, I was told that they were great to play but could prove a bit err, discombobulating after a few beers.

Returning refreshed, I spied our esteemed editor with whom I chewed the cud for a while while recharging my caffeine batteries before venturing forth once more. My next port of call was the Yamaha stand where I spent an intimate few minutes with an LL26, their refined dreadnought flagship model. A very playable beast she turned out to be too. Dan Stock from Yamaha explained about their ARE pre-aged woods and I must say that it does create a fine rich vintagesque tone which is quite startling for something straight out the box. I would have stayed longer but out the corner of my eye I caught a glimpse of a Panama hat approaching…

Moving on, I found myself at the Diamond Bottlenecks stand. I don't know about you but it's one thing I've never really mastered. During our chat they asked what I used at the moment and when I replied "a bottle of Bud" they seemed completely unfazed while pointing me in the direction of a lovely glass slide, which I duly purchased. Next to them was the Ivor Mairants stand, purveyors of wondrous instruments to the proletariat for 58 years. There I was able to try out a Gryphon 12-string, a unique instrument tuned to D, as in equivalent to the tenth fret. Having been blessed with hands reminiscent of a bunch of bananas, mandolins are too narrow in the fretboard for me, but this beast opened up that whole sonic range previously out of my grasp. At this rate I was going to run out of kidneys.

I could go on, but suffice to say it was a great, great day. More encounters ensued. A gentle flirtation with a Taylor 400 series 12-string, a quick cuddle with a close relation of a Martin D-18 and a full on knee-trembler with an Eastman T486B/V, curtailed only by, yes you've guessed it, wafting through the crowd, the boy in the Panama hat. ■

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